

Log of the *HILDE M²*



Vol. 1, No. 9

Issued by the Admiralty, Accokeek, Maryland

December 31, 1986

HAPPY NEW YEAR! The HM², with Karl and Alice the aloe, arrive in Christiansted, St. Croix, USVI, yesterday and I receive a most welcome phone call last evening all is fine and he'll be sending another letter soon.

* * * * *

NEXT PORT OF CALL will be in Panama. The plan is to leave St. Croix, weather permitting, about January 5 heading for the San Blas Islands. He will be joined by our cousin Jim Wall (who is teaching in Costa Rica for a year) about January 21 for some cruising and then the passage through the canal about January 29-30 or so. It is a mandatory two-day transit nowadays, we understand -- lots more on that later on.

Mailing Address: [Remember, this was back in 1986]
Karl Edler
Yacht "Hilde M²" in transit
General Delivery
c/o Postmaster
Cristobol, Panama

Postage is 39c for a regular one-ounce letter, or 33c for a postcard. He would surely enjoy receiving some mail ... please write him! It is a good idea to write on lower left of envelope or front of package a request for PM to hold for two weeks. Speaking of packages, he enjoys receiving such things as used paperback books (they can be recycled by trading with other cruisers). Don't send anything valuable.

* * * * *

LETTER #3 FROM THE CAPTAIN! Written aboard the *HILDE M²* anchored in Gorda Sound, Virgin Gorda, BVI, it's dated December 20, 1986:

"Dear Everybody,

"The last couple weeks in the BVI have been great but they probably don't make for interesting reading. I suspect that interesting stuff comes as a result of suffering on my part so I hope to bore the hell out of everybody during the rest of this expedition." (Editor's note: I'll drink to that -- my personal idea of the perfect cruise is one that's totally boring...)

"On Monday, December 8 I trotted around Road Town doing ship's business: laundry, supply purchase, mailing Boatlet#2 to B and checking for mail (none); doing a tiny bit of Christmas shopping; and generally getting my bearings. Doesn't sound like much but I was frazzled by the time I rowed back out to HM² in the late afternoon. It was fun to see the *SAGAFJORD* in the harbor and think about how different B's and my stay on Cunard's *COUNTESS* was here last year. In the evening I followed a suggestion by the Fruehaufs and walked back into town for dinner at the "Caribbean Casserole" - curried beef with green bananas - excellent, and the cost of \$16.50 included the service charge. That's nominal for this area, but I won't be able to do it often. Passed up an opportunity to see a Chinese Circus from Peking at the civic center. They wanted \$15 admission and I had seen something similar before,so felt a little bit more frugal about my evening on the town.



A street scene in Road Town, Karl's rental "Island Buggy" at R

"Tuesday morning I walked to the post office and mailed off the meager family gifts I had bought on my Monday outing." (Ed.Note: The family thought they were just fine!). "Wish I had more time to shop around for really good stuff but time was running out fast for international Christmas mail. Incidentally, the local people really get into the spirit of the season. Lots of Jingle Bells and carols on the radio stations and the lines at the PO for both incoming and outgoing packages are looong.

"Before noon I had the anchor up and was on my way across Sir Francis Drake Channel to Peter Island in 16-22 knot winds. We made good time with double reefed main and most of the genoa, but part way across the boat began to act strangely, slowing down to 2.5 knots with lots of weather helm. I couldn't figure out what was going on for several minutes until I glanced back and saw a large yellowish shape following the boat about 50' back, and then the unmistakable shadow of a rope from it passing under the port side of the boat. I checked for lines overboard and there were none. When I hove to for a better look the whole thing disappeared. I'm guessing now that we must have snagged something with our bobstay like a parasail that floated away from one of the resorts further up Drake Channel. Whatever it was, it made a great sea anchor and I wouldn't have minded having the rope.

"My anchorage for the night was White Bay on the W side of Peter Island. It looked good to me on the chart and it seemed to me that the steep hillside behind the beach would be perfect shelter from the strong SE wind. I was wrong. The wind eddied over the ridge and gusted all night sending the boat all

around her anchors and twisting my Bahamian mooring. The views were good, though, including two nude bathers on the otherwise deserted beach. The only other boat in sight had 3 French (judging from their conversation) men in their 20's, and they seemed to appreciate the scenery. I was appalled at how close they anchored to the shore. I find the distances deceiving and tend to anchor too far out, using more cable than necessary. In this case they were too far in because they had to re-anchor in the middle of the night when the wind shifted and put us stern to the shore. I thought for sure they'd end up on the beach. HM2 was fine, with room to spare, but it was a restless night with the wind swinging us about.

"Wednesday morning it took an extra half hour to get the two anchor lines untwisted and hauled in. My concern that the starboard anchor chain was "sawing" through the port anchor rode was apparently groundless, but I worked out a way to prevent it in the future (I hope). We were away at 7:45 for a quiet downwind sail to "the bight" on Norman Island. It seems to be a good idea to sail early here for two reasons: the wind does calm down at night and takes a while to gather full strength in the morning, and arriving early it's usually possible to find a favored spot close in (more shallow and sheltered) before too many others appear. In this case I got there before most of last night's boats had left and I tacked around in the harbor for 45 minutes while a half dozen yachts got themselves together and off for the day.

"We anchored fairly close by in 18' of water about 100 yards N of a rocky point and 200 yards W of a pebble beach. I jumped overboard with a mask to check out the anchor which had dug well into white sand with no nearby coral heads. We could have driven further in, as I found out when others came, but I'm gradually learning. My technique is to get everything prepared before we run in: with anchor off the bow roller, chain partly out on deck and stoppered, all set - then push in, run forward, and get the chain out hand over hand as the wind blows the bow off. It can still be a stomach-tightening experience single handed in strong wind, especially if the chain jams and there are other boats we could get blown down on before I can get back to the engine controls and the tiller.

"I have a problem anchoring very close to other vessels. Part of it is a territorial feeling, I suppose. I like to have breathing room. It's mostly a practical matter of having room enough to recover from errors. Apparently the feeling isn't shared in this crowded cruising area because other boats often come tearing up and throw down their hooks less than half as far away as I think proper. If they are using rope their scope has them swinging wide and nearly into the HM². In a couple cases they have had to re-anchor. In another case, they didn't have enough scope out and they dragged past me during the windy night. I've been cruising only a couple months and I'm already a curmudgeon." (Ed.: This is something new?? Oh, well, it takes one to know one...)

"After a good swim I spent the afternoon tightening the Aries vane mount and epoxying the points where the supports pass through the stern hawse holes. Later I got the compressor rigged in the cockpit and filled an air bottle before diving below the boat and across to the rocky point. Lots of brain and staghorn coral and beautiful blue, yellow, and orange fish and zillions of tiny ones that look like neon tetras. I still can't identify any but the parrot fish and barracuda. There were conch, sea cucumber, anemonies and lots more interesting flora and fauna I can't begin to name, much less describe.

"I later found out that this spot is one of the very best for diving in the Virgin Islands, and I just stumbled upon it! I had some trouble getting my left ear equalized so it took me a long time to work my way down to 20'. In the process, I was disturbed to find that my nearly new depth gage wasn't working. That's the one I got as a replacement for the gage that stuck on 90' during my last training dive at the quarry over in Virginia. At this point I'm not high on Sherwood scuba instruments.

"In the early evening I dinghied over to the beach for a bit of exploration. Back in the brush I found the ruins of some stone buildings and a newer but completely overgrown concrete cistern (I believe). It had obviously been built since the time PVC pipe became available, however long that may be. The vegetation is fairly thick if not lush, but semi-arid if that makes sense. There's some cactus and leathery leaved plants along with lots of low trees and bushes and some grasses thrown in. It grows fairly quickly I would guess. Along the way I spotted the largish tan/gray birds, almost like doves, that make a loud whistling cry, especially at night. I've heard it on all the islands.

"Back on the boat I heated up some Chicken a la King and had it over some old bread with canned fruit for desert. Good and easy. I've not been very inspired from a culinary point of view. By evening I'm generally tired and ready for something fast and simple.

"During the night there were frequent rain squalls and gusts, over 30 knots I would guess from the sound. A number of boats dragged including my closest neighbor and the nearby cruising schooner *HARVEY GAMMAGE*, but we stayed put. There were more than 25 boats in the anchorage, most obviously bare boat charters and a number of those were from The Moorings in Road Harbour.

"Thursday morning I had fun watching the pelicans flying near the rocky point, diving like bombshells and gobbling up small fish, probably the 'tetras' I saw yesterday. They keep it up from morning till night. It must take a lot of fish to keep a big bird like that flying. They say that aerodynamically it's impossible for them to fly at all, but someone forgot to tell the birds (Har Har). It was so pleasant that I decided to spend another night. The fact that I was well anchored and that more wind was forecast might have entered into it as well. A man at a marina in Road Town said it's working up to the Christmas Winds and I believe it.

"Constructively, I did more epoxy work on the Aries mount and on a dinghy rowlock and dove to give the HM² a good bottom scrubdown. I'm concerned about several places on her keel where she must have grounded. It looks like the gelcoat has been damaged in 3 places. There is no bottom paint left in the keel area and it is rapidly being rubbed away along the water line. There is almost no growth on the area where the paint is intact. That's interesting, because the Supertox bottom paint had been less than completely effective on the Potomac and Chesapeake.

"I refilled both scuba bottles with the compressor. It takes about a half hour per bottle to bring them to 3000 lbs pressure and makes a heckuva racket, but I think it's not too loud off the boat. In the afternoon I took a long dive along the rocky shore south of the point. The underwater scenery was not the best I've ever seen, but nice. When I got back I discovered that my digital watch was shot from the water. That's disgusting because it's supposed to be good to 150' and I never went below 15'. Boy, I'm really tearing up equipment on this voyage! Fortunately I have a back-up watch for navigation but that's it until I can get another main watch. No more watches on dives, I guess, though it's hard to keep track of time down there.

"The second night at 'the bight' was calmer, but occasional gusts whistled in the rigging. We were up and off for Road Town early Friday. The trip took about 2 hours with the usual boisterous wind. I spent almost as much time getting the anchor up and down as we did on the beam reach across the 6 mile wide channel. I used the designated anchorage near Fort Burt on the south side of the harbor again, although it is exposed and rough in a SE wind and it's a half mile walk into town. Some boats anchor inside the Wickham's Cay jetties although it's officially prohibited, but I was a straight arrow.

"There was no mail or package from home but the replacement Aries vane pendulum had arrived from England. A stop at the grocery for essentials and then it was back to the marina at Fort Burt for a much needed shower and ice. The anchor was up again at 3 PM for the short downwind run to Soper's Hole on the West End. It was a sleigh ride in the 20 K wind. The S shore of Tortola shot by and we were lying quietly at a mooring by 5 PM and all set for an early start in the morning for Maho Bay, St. John and the big annual Caribbean gathering of the SSCA (Seven Seas Cruising Association).

"Highlight of the evening was a telephone call to B. I was so glad to talk to her. Letters are fine but they aren't the same. In desperation, I also tried calling the Tillermaster people in California to order another - and got a damned recording. It wasn't quite 4 PM out there.

"Saturday I was up at 6 and away by 7 for the fairly short downwind run to the rendezvous site. When I arrived about 9:30 I found about 40 boats in the broad bay. At first glance it looked as though there was no room to anchor within a half mile, but up close there were open spots. I'm learning how to anchor in the pack but I'm glad I arrived when I did. I saw a Slocum Society flag on *HONEY TOO* and rowed over to say hello. On the way back I visited with Ted and Jan DaVilla on *HOHOQ*, a cruising couple I've read about for years.

"No one seemed to be going ashore but a lot of visiting was going on between boats. It turned out that a local woman (who had lost her shore property to the Park Service some years ago, it seems) had been out chasing people off the beach with a lot of choice language and a machete. Some of the local people went to Cruz Bay to file a complaint and the police department came and detained her around 11 AM. More than a hundred cruisers moved ashore with fantastic food, musical instruments, and sea stories for a fine gam. As usual with pot luck affairs, there was more than enough to eat, and all good. There were so many people that it was hard to meet them all. Obviously this really was a reunion for most, with all the "catching up" to do the talk was fast and furious. It's my impression that the crowd was bigger than that at the SSCA get-together in Annapolis B and I attended last October. Anyway it was great. Mark and Margaret Fruehauf, my Southern Cross friends, were there. Otherwise, I believe everyone was new to me, but most friendly.

"One couple (sorry, I've forgotten their names) on *RESOLUTE* left Beaufort the same day I did and had the same 50 hour easterly over the Gulf Stream. They ended up 9 days later in Bermuda, waited 2 weeks for parts and better weather, then made a nominal 7 day passage down to St. Thomas.

"I was impressed by the number of wind chargers on cruising boats in the harbor. There are lots of different kinds and not much consensus on what kind is best. Seems like most models have drawbacks of one kind or another.

"The party broke up around 5 PM when word got around that 'Machete Betty' had been released. After the big feed I ate little back on the boat, but sat in the cockpit and enjoyed the gentle breeze (for a change). The weather department had done handsomely by SSCA with the calmest and nicest day in several weeks. The nearly full moon shone down on the bay full of boats, a calm and restful scene.

"Sunday morning at quarter til seven, as quietly as I could, I pulled up the anchor and slipped away between the sleeping and just-stirring boats for our upwind trip on Sir Francis Drake Channel. Fortunately, the wind was nearly calm at that hour and we were able to motor-sail through 'the narrows',

the most difficult part, before tacking along Little Thatch Island and Tortola. Gradually the wind increased until I had to pull in most of the genny to keep the gunnels out of the water.

"By 10 am we were off Key Point on Peter Island and I decided to spend the afternoon and evening there. It's a spectacular anchorage, protected to the E by a sloping ridge and to the S by Key Cay (pronounced key), a rocky outcropping separated from the rest of the island by a shallow 100 yd ledge over which the surf breaks. From the boat you could see spray flying 50' in the air over the end of Key Point. As soon as we were safely anchored, I took the dinghy ashore with the camera all wrapped in plastic, for pictures of the surf and the rocks, the cactus on the sloping hillside, and the little HM² peacefully lying in the blue cove below. That's what cruising is all about for me.



HM² at anchor off Peter Island

"While I was back on the boat for lunch 3 more boats came in, acting kind of strangely. One 40' go-fast type came in under full sail with about 8 college age kids aboard, tacking furiously around in the small cove in less than 10' of water. Then they dropped their sails, letting them flap on deck. Finally it dawned on me that they couldn't power though their motor was running. They must have wrapped a line on their prop. At any rate, the 3 boats finally got rafted up and the 15 or so young people dinghied and swam ashore for a picnic leaving the sails still flapping on deck.

"I was a bit upset at the intrusion. They had every right to be there, but it nearly spoiled my afternoon. I guess I had been having a desert island fantasy and looking forward to one night in a lone anchorage. So I puttered around doing odd jobs like installing the new Aries pendulum rudder and snorkeling near the boat while the crowd ashore built a fire on the beach and broke out the food. The snorkeling was poor, the water being murky from the nearby surf, but I could see many coral heads and wanted to move the boat closer in to a better position.

"Unfortunately for the kids, the weather deteriorated during the afternoon, clouding up and eventually raining hard in a series of squalls. They eventually went back to their boats and left in disgust. I breathed a sigh of relief and promptly moved my boat into a better spot for the solitary night I had been wanting. A nearly full moon, lots of small clouds floating by, and no lights but those on St. John some miles to the west, completed the peaceful scene.

"I enjoyed sitting in the cockpit soaking it all in and listening to AFCN (Armed Forces Caribbean Network) broadcasting from Roosevelt Roads at the east end of Puerto Rico. They have NBC, ABC and CBS news, American style top 40 programming and announcements from Navy family services and the like. It makes a welcome change from the Latin music of Puerto Rico and the calypso and reggae of the Virgins. I was half expecting to hear Dave Rosenberg's voice doing one of his briefings and imagine they really do run some of his tapes on their TV channel.

"Monday morning I was off for Road Town again at 8 AM, motorsailing because I was too lazy to put up the mainsail for the short run, and anchored at 9:30 in our now-familiar spot off Fort Burt. I dinghied across the harbor to Wickham's Cay with laundry and photos to develop. At the PO there were two (2) packages for me from B. Bliss! Enclosed were letters, Xmas gifts (still unopened), and checks so I can get cash and travelers checks' through American Express.

"In the afternoon I took the short wave ham transceiver to Cay Electronics at the suggestion of Mark Fruehauf who had just got a job there, picked up my photos, and rented a 'Mini Moke' (a cross between a dune buggy and a golf cart) for a day for trips to Nannie Cay and Prospect Reef, in search of a canvas shop and a replacement depth gauge. Having found both, I spent the late afternoon exploring the west end of the island. The roads were incredibly steep in places but my vehicle took them fine. Don't know if B would have enjoyed it but I had fun. You could look over the side (the car had open sides) and look nearly straight down at a blue bay with surf rolling in toward white sand and green palm trees -- like a carnival ride but lots better.

"The next morning I had the luxury of driving into town to the PO where I posted a letter to B and picked up one from Hilde which was most appreciated, followed by food shopping and a tour of the east end of Tortola and Beef Island (which is connected by an ancient draw bridge). On the way back along Ridge Road there were fabulous views of both sides of the island. There were lots of potential house sites up there but only a few "for sale" signs. I don't know what they cost but whatever it is they would be worth it.



View of the harbor from atop Tortola

"I stopped at one of the island's top (literally) tourist attractions, Skyworld. It's a small, 20 tables maybe, restaurant/bar on the top of a 1300' hill with great views in all directions. Had some of their renowned black bean soup for early lunch and it was ok. After delivering various goods back to the boat I returned the vehicle and hoofed it back around the harbor for a quiet night on the HM².

"By arrangement, I delivered the boat to Nannie Cay Wednesday morning so the sail shop there could measure her for a new cockpit dodger and awning. We were there by 10 AM but the canvas people didn't get the measuring done 'til 4 PM so I had to shelve plans for crossing the channel and anchoring out. Instead, we spent the night at the marina - our first since San Juan. It was very nice, with floating docks. While I waited during the day for the canvas people, I completed transferring fuel from the forward tank (which I will generally keep empty now to lighten the bow) to the main tank, did some badly needed cabin cleanup and wrote a lot of this.

"It was a quiet but useful day, I suppose, followed by a warm shower - the first I've had since Beaufort (except for the Sunshower on the boat which doesn't count because there's not much of it). What luxury to stand and turn under lots of warm water! That alone was almost worth the \$17.05 for the night. Boaters who have money for marinas could do far worse than Nannie Cay and I guess that word is out, because there are a lot of boats there including some SSCA cruisers. I recognized a couple of boats from Beaufort, including *NIGHT CLOUD*, and I saw *PISCATAWAY*, a good looking sailboat from Fort Washington, Maryland.

"Thursday, December 18, I sailed most of the day to Virgin Gorda, second largest and easternmost of the major British Virgins. Because there are few good anchorages, we put into the Virgin Gorda Yacht Harbour and spent another night at a slip. This one was not nearly as nice as Nannie Cay even though it's operated by the Rockefeller interests. There were no finger piers, just towering pilings with no way to get lines on them easily. No laundromat, which I could have used, but their showers were palatial. All in all I'm sorry I didn't anchor out. As it turned out, the night was calm and there would have been no problem. Hindsight is always 20-20, you know.

"After supper on the boat, I took a walk across the island which is about a half mile wide at that point. Along the road were sparsely scattered homes ranging from a couple of nicely designed modern ones to a shanty with shutters in place of glass or louvered windows. You could see the glow of a candle or lantern through cracks in the unpainted wood walls but the yard was neat. The family there was just very poor.

"Further along was a small concrete and block Methodist church (the BVI are strongly Methodist) that looked just like one of the models you put under a Xmas tree. It was brightly lit inside with all the windows and doors open and about 2/3 full for a service. As I walked along I heard familiar hymns and carols sung strongly - and the congregation clapped after each one. A little beyond the church I could look out over the Atlantic with nothing between me and Africa. The swells were not running high, but the moonlit surf was still impressive.

"The next morning after buying ice and fruit I motored a little more than a mile south to 'the baths', an area of huge house-sized boulders jumbled together along the coast where the sea forms pools between the rocks. It's famous among cruisers so I had to have a look. Anchoring, I rowed the dink to an adjacent beach and snorkeled around the area. Already at 9 AM there were lots of sightseers and boats were converging on the area. It was impressive both above and below water. I could go under on the sea side and come up in a pool with sunlight filtering down through the rocks - sort of like spelunking except these weren't caves. The fish through the area were beautiful.

"A couple of hours in the area were enough for me and at 11 AM I upped anchor and steered for Gorda Sound, an almost landlocked arm of the sea between Virgin Gorda and Mosquito and Prickly Pear Islands to the N. The area is gorgeous. It looks like a lake with low mountain peaks all around it, brilliant blue, of course. Several resorts have been built around the edge including a striking Scandinavian looking complex called Tradewinds.

"Anchored off one of the resorts called The Bitter End was the fanciest and most ostentatious yacht I have ever seen. It was more than 150' long, gleaming white, obviously new, named *NEW HORIZONS* from Southampton. I believe it might belong to some part of the British royalty because it had some fancy coats of arms topped with coronets. I anchored a couple hundred yards away. At night the thing was brilliantly lit, and tenders came and went during the evening though there didn't appear to be much happening on the ship. I suppose the owners were ashore most of the time. Knowing what the HM² cost and continues to cost in upkeep, I am sobered by that display of raw unimaginable wealth. I don't think a couple million a year would keep that ship going. B will remember the new white yacht in Beaufort owned by someone named McCormack, I believe. This was like that, magnified a few times.



HM² acquired a figurehead when a Pelican dropped in for a rest in Gorda Sound

"In spite of the beautiful scenery, there was a fly in the ointment - or rather lots of no-see-ums. During the evening they swarmed everywhere. There wasn't enough wind to blow them away and they were pesky in the extreme. I searched for some Off and found some old Cutter repellent from our mountaineering days. It was kind of rancid, but I gladly smeared on arms and legs and it seemed to help.

"I decided Saturday would be a sag day. I moved the boat S to a breezier less buggy location, did some snorkeling, and typed this. And that brings us up to date. Alice looks a little peaked and I've promised her some plant food but keep forgetting to look in the stores in Road Town. These resort places don't have that sort of thing.

"Hope all is well with you, and hope that I'll be seeing some of you in the not too-distant future. And all of you in the Frozen Northland, take heart. Tomorrow is the shortest day of the year (always one of Murr's favorites, since it means better times will be here soon), and the sun will be coming your way again. Since you won't see this before Christmas, I wish you good health and good fortune in the new year.

"With love, Karl, Dad, etc."

* * * * *

TECHNOLOGICAL INFORMATION DEPT: K reports that the computer tends to get flaky when the boat voltage drops below 12.2; he unintentionally trashed a backup diskette so has now worked out a double backup system. It pulls the batteries down pretty fast, too, getting about 4 hours use before having to recharge with engine.

Back at Edlehorst II, we have a good Christmas with all kinder and me enjoying lots of presents, food, and other fun things -- despite all this, it's of course not quite the same, with K not at home. We're glad he's having his Great Adventure, but look forward to other holidays after he's back with us in Normal Dull Life again....

Copyright 1986, 2002 Karl and Barbara Edler

[Main Page](#)

[Next Issue](#)