



VAN NOORT

TO THE

RESCUE

SOS SOS The signal flashed over Van Noort's radio at 1231 GMT (2031 local) on 20th May as the ship was southbound from Sydney to Hobart. The vessel in distress was the 1100-ton bucket dredger 'WORLD ATLAS'. She had first run into difficulties during the afternoon and had informed Sydney Radio that, although her engine had broken down, she was not in immediate need of assistance.

Suddenly '**MAYDAY, MAYDAY**'—buffeted by gale force winds and enormous seas, the World Atlas was listing heavily and sinking. The crew was abandoning ship.

Captain Adamse of Van Noort reports:—

"During the previous hour I had observed an echo on the radar screen which had gradually become less distinct. This echo had first been observed on the port bow and shortly before the receipt of the SOS message it had disappeared just abaft the port beam at a distance of 4.2 miles. On receipt of the message I concluded that the echo related to the craft referred to in that message."

Van Noort relayed this information to Sydney and then proceeded through the storm towards the indicated position. She was the first vessel to arrive on the scene, and it was thanks to her locating the sinking dredger that the Commonwealth Navigation Department, directing the search and rescue operations, was able to pinpoint the spot where the World Atlas went down.

Towards midnight, Van Noort observed a flare on the port beam and soon afterwards another more distant light. The signals came from a small raft to which 2 men were clinging for their lives. For hours the Van Noort battled against violent seas and now gale Force 10 winds to approach the raft, but the task was virtually impossible. Once she came near enough to have some hope of success but the force of the wind was such that the life buoys never got free of the hull. The Captain attempted to keep the raft in sight while his own ship rode out the storm, but eventually it was tossed out of view and despite continued searching, was not seen again. By daybreak the weather had abated slightly and other ships arrived to join the search.

Shortly before 0800, a reconnaissance aircraft of the Australian Navy spotted a raft with two men aboard. The seas were so rough that the ships in the area were unable to pick them up and so the task was accomplished by an air/sea rescue helicopter. Two more survivors were later picked up in the same way.



During the Memorial Service on board Straat Lombok, the ship's flag flies at half mast.

The search continued: all day long the ships scanned the seas through a trail of oil, slick and debris 20 miles long and a mile wide but it became increasingly obvious that the rest of the dredger's crew had perished. The only items of interest Van Noort sighted were one empty life belt, three oars and an overturned aluminium life boat. Eventually the search was abandoned, the vessels concerned thanked for their help, and Van Noort resumed her voyage to Hobart.

One of the survivors later described how the crippled World Atlas, engulfed in pitch darkness and dashed by gale force winds and mountainous seas, suddenly turned turtle and sank. The Captain went down with his ship, and of a complement of 17 men on board, only 4 survived.

On May 28th a short memorial service was conducted by the Senior Captain of the Missions to Seamen on board Straat Lombok at the approximate spot where the tragedy occurred. Wreaths from family, friends and relatives of those who perished on the World Atlas were committed to the deep. Straat Lombok was chosen, as she was a vessel of the same fleet as Van Noort, the first ship on the scene of the disaster.

Captain G. Ross, Senior Director of the Navigation Department in charge of search operations, praised the Van Noort for the part she played in the operations and stated that he would like to visit the ship on her return to Sydney and personally compliment the Master, his officers and crew.

