

**MODERN-DAY
BOATING DISASTERS, TRAGEDIES AND CALAMITIES
ALONG THE CALIFORNIA
CENTRAL COAST**



By

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INDEX

PRELUDE

BEAR NECESSITY

CC RIDER

OUT OF AFRICA

TICKET

RUBICON & THE CLARA B II

ROAM

MOONGOOSE

CHAMP

LOU DENNY WYANE

PIRATE

SNEAKER

MICRO BUS

CC & GLORIA

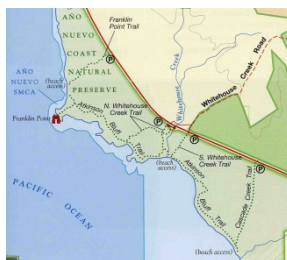
A BIT BETTER

PRELUDE

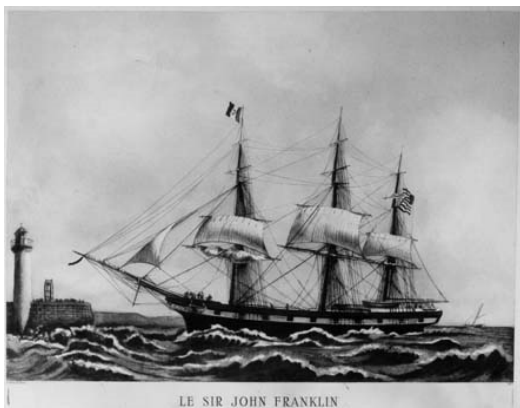
Names of places have always fascinated me. Especially names of points along our rugged and at times treacherous California seashore. We all know that Pigeon Point was named after the sailing ship *Carrier Pigeon* that missed the Golden Gate in 1853. The clipper ship *Carrier Pigeon* was 129 days out of Boston when she struck the rocks of what was then referred to then as "PUNTA de la BALLENA". A navigational error of just 60 miles. The ship along with its beautiful figurehead of a pigeon became a total loss as well as a small tugboat named the *Seabird* that came down from San Francisco to be of assistance. A lighthouse was erected on the point that bears the name of Pigeon Pt.

But what of **Franklin Pt.** the point just south of there and located within the Año Nuevo State Marine Conservation Area. This site receives very low visitation compared to Pigeon Pt. Most of us just drive by without giving it a second look. This moderately sloping site consists of extremely uneven terrain, containing many deep cracks and folds. But what happened here? And who was Franklin?

While searching for San Francisco in 1865, the American clipper, *Sir John Franklin*, lost her way in a dense fog and mountainous sea. When the weather cleared some 24 hours later, the captain viewed the breakers ahead with great alarm....but it was already too late



According to the San Francisco Gazette of January 21 1865 "The ship "**Sir John Franklin**", from Baltimore heading for this port, (S.F.) went ashore just south of Pigeon Point, on the night of the 17th January. Capt. DISPLEAX and eleven seamen were drowned. The prevalence of a dense fog had presented the taking of an observation for twenty-four hours. The vessel was thought to have been a considerable distance off shore, but the fog lifted and showed her to be close on the breakers, into which she drifted. She soon parted amidships, and the sea made a clean breach over her. Three mates and five seamen managed to get ashore. And the rest of the crew were drowned and were buried on the point. The ship was laden with the cargo that was declared a total loss".



In earlier days serving in duties from master to cook on board various research ships, Commercial fishing vessels, tug & barge boats and yachts on numerous transits up and down the west coast from Mexico to Alaska. Looking out the port hole I've wondered about the names given to the "PUNTAS"! Or points of land that jet out into the sea along the rugged California coast. I came to find many of the origins of the names stem from priests on board Spanish exploration and Manilla treasure Galleons. These "Monks of the sea" named many of these ragged points as they first encountered them and prayed (in fear) as they opened their holy book.

Chinese Ming Dynasty (1368-1644) pottery was unearthed by archaeologists in an ancient Indian site near Drakes Bay. What were the Indians doing with porcelain dinnerware? It was determined that the pottery was from the cargo of the Manila Galleon "**ST. AUGUSTINE**" which ran aground there in 1595 (California's first recorded shipwreck).

Ano Nuevo islet which you will read about allot in this short treaty was named by Father Antonio de la Ascension, chaplain for the Don Sebastian Vizcaino expedition, on January 3, 1603.

Others Pt.'s such as PIGEON POINT as we know was named (or renamed) after the medium-size clipper ship "**CARRIER PIGEON**" that ran aground there in 1858. The nearby town of Pescadero is built from the lumber and nails that the ship carried from Boston and intended for profitable resale in San Francisco. FRANKLIN POINT just south of PIGEON POINT was (re) named after the sailing cargo ship "**FRANKLIN**" which ran aground there in the 1850s with the loss of all hands. Recently a tourist walking in the nearby dunes spotted human bones sticking out of the sand. Just one of the 22 sailors that were buried was lost there and only to be found to late in the shifting sands of time.



Why is lighted buoy on the northwest approach to San Francisco Bay just north of the Farallon Islands named **NOONDAY BUOY**? The rock it marks rises abruptly from 20 fathoms to its shallowest point in what's known as "Fannie Shoals". The clipper ship "**NOONDAY**" had made it all the way from New York around Cape Horn only to be done in so close of its final destination of San Francisco. "**NOONDAY BUOY**" rock derives its name from that clipper ship that struck the rock in 1862 and sank within an hour.

BLOSSOM ROCK buoy (inside San Francisco Bay). Captain Blossom sailed into San Francisco Bay for the purposes of evaluating the area. His naval ship struck that rock, his ship also sank and now that rock bears Captain Blossom's name.

On the evening of September 8, in 1923 the entire U.S. Pacific BATTLE FLEET 11th Destroyer Squadron went on the rocks off PEDERNALES POINT in what is all but forgotten incredible navigation blunders of U.S. naval history. In a five minute interval, seven battle ready destroyers and 23 enlisted men were lost and scores were injured. Fog and navigational error by the admiral of the fleet himself were found to be the culprits.



In its over its 500+ years of maritime history, the white sandy beaches of the West Coast have witnessed countless scenes of crew death and ship disasters. Hardly a grain of sand along the 1,264 mile California coastline has escaped the agony of shipwrecks. Clipper ships, Windjammers, Cargo Schooners, Steamers, and ships of all kinds as well as their captains, crews, passengers and the dreamers and drunks on board. They alike all deserve to have their stories told.



In days of the past there was no VHF, SSB radio communication, No Cell phones, no Coast Guard ready for action and no VESSEL ASSIST standing by to give help & assistance (some for profit) to the mariner. Things have definitely gotten better in some things in this modern world and mariner safety has improved greatly.



But still the coast takes its toll. The deadly sandbar at the entrance to San Francisco (known as the "graveyard of ships") and its famed north POTATOPATCH (named after a barge full of potatoes from Bolinas turned turtle leaving the crew and thousands of potatoes floating in the water) and its sister "the FOUR FATHOM BANK" which lies just off POINT BONITA were its shifting sands caused by the tide make charts useless and don't forget across the channel on the southern side the famed South channel over the "SOUTH BAR". There is no south channel! These shallow bars have all played a major part in maritime mishaps yesterday and today.

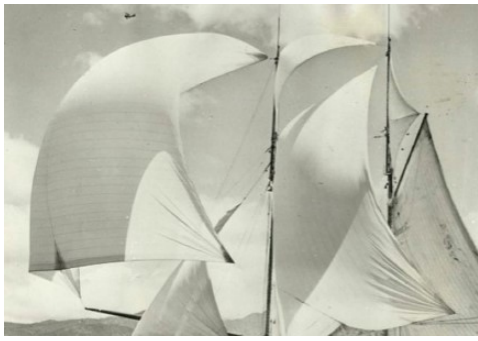
These areas have recorded of over 300 + boating accidents over last ten year's alone. The San Francisco bar(s) are treacherous things even though the main shipping channel is dredged and marked as it is. The sea conditions might be calm on the inside of the bay but tides change and the afternoon winds pick up and can take the unaware mariner completely by surprise. Take for instance as a recent Example; the 30 foot cabin cruiser "**ALOHA**" which was destroyed by waves reported to have been higher than 20 feet just west of the Golden gate. Boat debris washed up on nearby OCEAN BEACH but the five men who went out on that boat for a day of sport fishing were never found. A few days later another boat capsized just 6 miles west of the Golden Gate Bridge. Reported by their wives and overdo and missing these day fisherman were lost and only one of them washed up on nearby MUIR BEACH months later.

Other hazards along the coast exist. On March 2, 1986 two fishermen were killed off San Clemente Island when their boat the "**CINDY FAY**" snagged unexploded Navy ordnance. The fishermen died in the explosion, and their vessel, "**CINDY FAY**" was completely destroyed. The unexploded ordnance was left on the sea floor by the U.S. military. Snagging it with an anchor caused the destruction of the fishing vessel. The bodies of the two fishermen along with the boats wreckage was found all the way off Mail Point, on the western side of San Clemente by another fisherman who heard the explosion.

The Sacramento Reef located 29° 50' N by 115° 50' W is 2.5 miles wide and 2 miles long reef that runs in a northwest to southeast direction 110 miles south of Ensenada, Mexico and Just off the southern tip of Isla San Geronimo about 12 miles off Punta San Antonio on the Baja Peninsula. The reef's name stems from the steam ship "**SACRAMENTO**", a 270-foot side-wheel passenger steamer which left San Francisco in December of 1872 on its way to Panama when on met her end there when it hit the then uncharted reef. The ship's captain, crew and all 145 passengers miraculously made it to safety to the nearby Isla San Geronimo though the ship was a total loss.

Not so lucky was the schooner "**GOODWILL**" which on May 25 1969 went aground there and was a constructive total loss including the yachts owner and its 9 member crew. The SACRAMENTO REEF by this time was well marked on the chart. Still the schooner hit it. The Schooner "**GOODWILL**" was one of the largest schooners ever built measuring some 161 feet in length. The 229 ton steel vessel was commissioned for Keith Spalding of the sporting good family and built by Bethlehem Shipbuilding Corporation in 1922. Spalding owned the "GOODWILL" for over 20+ years but the ship was taken from him during World War II by the U.S. Navy Department and utilized on the West Coast as a coastal patrol craft. After the war in 1951 the Navy sold the "**GOODWILL**" at auction for \$35,000. A Mr. Ralph Larrabee of Newport Beach, California purchased the vessel. The boat was kept in Newport Beach now Anaheim Bay in what was then known as SCHOONER ROW so named because of the number of large Gloucester type sailing schooners that were moored there. The PURITAN, the VEGA, the LUCKY STAR and the GOODWILL where lined up along the bay. Larrabee spent a fortune restoring the "**GOODWILL**" taking away its Navy gray back to its intended yacht condition. In 1953 Larrabee entered the vessel in the Los Angeles to Honolulu TRANS-PAC race and again in 1959 winning both events.

I can remember as a young boy visiting the GOODWILL with my father and being impressed by its size. I also remember my shock and interest when in 1969 the GOODWILL was lost.



The value and the accuracy of the west coast's nautical charts depend upon geological info which is based on past naval surveys of the area and the navigator's ability to read the chart correctly. Nautical Charts only represent general conditions as were reported at the time and do not necessarily portray present conditions. Significant changes may have taken place since the charts were printed. Characteristics represent a sampling of the sea bottom and the bottom is subject to constant changes. Rocks and boulders abound along the coast and it is always possible that the chart in use may have failed to find every obstruction. Thus when navigating along the coast, the prudent mariner must always be on the lookout. Despite the best efforts of the Coast Guard, Navigational aids such as buoys and lights may be carried off without the knowledge of the mariner. Navigators should not implicitly rely on the buoys being in the charted position. Navigational aids, light ships, fog signals etc. are sometimes temporarily removed for maintenance or carried away by weather. The simple fact is that buoys are connected to sinkers of various links of chain and the positions are not under continuous surveillance. It is true that the Coast Guard checks the buoys periodically but this can sometime be years apart. Position of the buoys can shift inside or outside the charted symbol on the chart by the forces of nature. The Mariner is also cautioned that buoys are liable not only to be carried away by weather but shifted, capsized or sunk. Lighted buoys may have their lights extinguished and or sound signals may not function due to accidents and or nature. Day beacons and buoys along dredged channels and entrances to harbors do not always mark the channels edge. Navigational Aids may be moved, discontinued or replaced during dredging operations. Mariner must always exercise caution. For the foregoing reasons the mariner must not rely completely upon the operation of floating aids to his navigation. Storm surge and sometimes destructive waves can change water levels as well.

The West Coast sea conditions are mild most of the time but are subject to heavy weather. The West Coast prevailing winds are North Westerly and blow nearly every day and usually stronger in the afternoons. Putting the boat on what is known as a "LEE SHORE". Good seamanship calls for monitoring weather conditions. Northwest winds and strong squall conditions can flow down canyons and severe choppy seas encountered. Fog is also a common occurrence. In other words West Coast can be treacherous for the mariner.



The central California coast including the Monterey Bay has had its share of Maritime tragedies. This rugged stretch of coastline with its treacherous outline rocks and sometimes wild sea conditions have destroyed numerous craft (and their crew and cargo) dating from the early years of California and continuing on till this day. In 1972 one of its victims was the gaff rigged schooner "**SHAMROCK VI**" which dragged its anchor and went ashore by the Santa Cruz Beach Boardwalk. The Shamrock VI had sailed down from San Francisco to visit Santa Cruz. The boat was anchored off the Santa Cruz wharf when a strong southerly wind with a reported gust of 70 kn put the vessel on a lee shore.



The Shamrock VI dragged its anchor and ended up on the beach in front of the Boardwalk. It was quite a sight seeing that graceful schooner stuck in the sand. Numerous attempts to salvage the craft failed and she sat there for nearly a month before finally being freed. Once re-floated it was decided by the salvage crew that the boat should be taken back to San Francisco. During the tow "up the hill" the SHAMROCK VI filled with water and went down in the deep water and was lost forever.

Many of the stories of past historical shipwrecks and disasters are well recorded in numerous books by countless authors such as Don Marshall, Jim Gibbs, Randall Reinstedt and others and make for fascinating reading.

My career as a Marine Surveyor started when I was appointed by GEARY ASSOCIATES Surveyors to the Underwriters at LLOYDS. It has been a quite fascinating journey indeed. Now some 42 years later as I get ready for retirement and going through insurance claim files I came to realize, that there are many untold and interesting stories perfect for the armchair sailor. So from those claim files I decided to present "TRUE STORIES ". I now present you the reader with **MODERN-DAY BOATING DISASTERS, TRAGEDIES AND CALAMITIES ALONG THE CALIFORNIA CENTRAL COAST** of which I have personally been involved with for your edification, enjoyment and to maybe help the new mariner from making some of these costly mistakes.

ABOUT: Joseph W. Rodgers is a licensed U.S. Coast Guard Merchant Marine Officer. Capt.



Rodgers is also a Certified Marine Surveyor, (CMS) senior member of the National Association of Marine Surveyors and was the past regional vice president of that organization. He is an acknowledge member of the American Society of Appraisers, (ASA) Machinery and Equipment section specializing in Maritime Technical Valuation. From 1978 to present Captain Rodgers has been representing American and London Institute of Marine

Underwriters, international and domestic financial institutions, yacht brokers, law firms, corporations, and private individuals providing detailed marine surveys and damage reports on commercial ships, fishing boats private vessels and yachts of all sizes. Capt. Joseph W. Rodgers is also an American Sailing Association instructor. His years of saltwater experience have given him some insights and a lot of interesting marine related stories.