

Captain Phyllis Randolph Dunkin

By: Will Johnson

Captain Randolph Dunkin, known to all his friends as 'Rannie', was born on Saba on December 27th, 1907. His mother was Mary Dunkin from Below-The-Gap. He was born in old Capt. Will Simmons' home, which coincidentally now belongs to his nephew former Lt. Governor Wycliffe Smith.

Randolph's father was Captain Ernest Vanterpool, a member of the family which produced several captains and owners of schooners.

Randolph went to school in the building where the Housing Foundation is now located. His teachers were Sister Euphresine and Sister Georgine. Randolph also had four sisters on his mother's side of the family. One of those sisters was the well known Mrs. Ruth Smith a great Christian, volunteer social worker and so on.

He started sailing in 1923. He left here with "Gardy" Hassell on the "Cyril" a 60 tons schooner which belonged to Mr W.H. Netherwood of St.Maarten. This schooner was lost on a reef, after a hurricane season, coming out of the Oyster Pond.

He then started sailing on the schooner the 'Virginia'. This schooner was owned by Captain Abraham Mardenborough and later sold to the government with Captain Abraham still in command. Captain Abraham was married to Miss Ohnie Wathey and they had a lovely old time mansion on the Front Street in St.Maarten. It was located on the beach across the street from the 'Oranje School'.

Later on Randolph went to sail on the "Ina Vanterpool" a large three master schooner which belonged to his uncle Captain Thomas Charles Vanterpool. After that he went to sail on the 'Thelma' a schooner owned by Captain Aldrick Dowling of St. John's. That schooner used to trade with Barbados and St.Thomas but also went to other places in the Caribbean. He later sailed on the large schooner the "Three Sisters" owned by Captain William Benjamin Hassell and his brothers.

When he started sailing he started out as a cabin boy and went to the islands around Saba like St.Kitts and St. Thomas.

He went to Barbados on a trip with Capt. Will Leverock on the "Three Sisters" to put her on dry-dock and remained there for 15 days. They left here on a Monday and arrived there on a Friday morning. All the boats mentioned so far were strictly sailboats.

The motors only came with the large 145 foot schooner the "Mayflower" in 1929. This vessel was a large 2 master and belonged to Captain Thomas Charles Vanterpool. Her captain was Reuben Simmons of Hell's Gate. The schooner broke her bowsprit and both masts in 1931, to the North-East of Bonaire. She went to Bonaire, towed there by the Dutch Man-O-War the "B.K." There she underwent the necessary repairs and then sailed to Curacao. Captain Tommy sold her to someone in Jamaica and that's the last anyone heard of her. The "Thelma" went ashore in Tortola in the thirties. The "Virginia" in the gale of 1928, broke her moorage and was never heard of again. She was anchored in St. Kitts and did not have anyone on board. Captain Mardenborough was not on that trip. Captain Conrad Richardson was captain at the time.

Randolph used to sail once a month to Curacao with the "Ina Vanterpool" and the "Three Sisters". The "Mayflower" made the trip every two weeks. He sailed with Capt. T.C. Vanterpool and Capt. Reuben Simmons mostly. Captain Reuben was not there the time she broke her masts, Luke Vlaun was the captain.

Later on he went to Curacao to work for the SHELL oil company, on boats bringing crude oil from Lake Maracaibo in Venezuela. This he did for about one year. Then he went to Aruba where he worked for ESSO for two years on Lago's oil fleet. He came back home to Saba in 1939.

Before that time, in 1932, he owned a sloop named the "Nautilus" which he bought from Granville van Romondt for fls.1.250.—.She got lost between St.Kitts and Statia in 1934. The wind just came up strong and rolled her over. They had a flat bottom 9 ft boat on board. He and his brother Garnet Hughes rowed into Statia to get help. They left William James Linzey and Hilton Whitfield on the upturned wreck.

This accident happened at 10.30 pm, they arrived in Statia at 1 am at the Police Station. They picked up two boats and accompanied by police officer Van Zanten they headed back to the wreck. They had lights with them. Randolph was in one boat and Garnet in the other. Hilton saw the light and gave a whoop. According to Captain Randolph, Hilton and Jamesy looked like two wet rats. They got back safely into Statia on a Saturday morning.

In 1939 on his return to Saba he bought the "Energy" a "cobalt" Tortola boat, one mast. He bought it from J.A.W.Georges, a Tortola merchant for US \$300.—He had that sloop until the war was declared and then he sold her to the government for fls.900.--. He then went back to Aruba and worked there until he returned to Saba in 1946.

He bought another "cobal" named the "Eden" in 1946 from Edward Tutt in Tortola. He paid U.S.\$1.300.—for her and owned her until 1959, then he bought the much larger "Santa Lou" from Blanche Potter in Tortola for US \$ 4.600.—

Capt. Randolph was also shipwrecked on the sloop the "Bertha Johnson" which belonged to the Magras family on St. Barths. He went to St. Kitts and loaded with 120 sheets of asbestos for St.Barths. He left the "Eden" in St. Barths and took the "Bertha Johnson" and was on his second trip to St.Kitts when he got lost. The sloop had been built by Stanley Johnson in St.Eustatius.

This accident happened on the night of June 21st, 1949. All of his crew was lost. They were William Wilson, married to Rosalie Wilson, they had 7 or 8 children. Peter Linzey, brother of Maude Linzey. He was married to Christine a sister of Capt. Randolphs, and they lived at The Gap, and Desmond Levenstone, a bachelor.

William Wilson and Peter Linzey were the grandfathers of our present State Secretary Mrs. Amelia Nicholson, born Linzey.

Only Randolph survived. According to him it was a squally night ,and then suddenly a thick squall loomed up out of nowhere. He decided to put in at Sandy Point. While going in, rain came in to the land. He put the helm into the wind, and she turned right over, about one and a half miles from the shore and within 2 or 3 minutes she sank. Desmond, Peter and Page got out from between the rigging. Randolph and Page were swimming on oars. He called out to the others. They continued to swim and call out to one another. After a while Desmond and they did not respond. Page was fully clothed, and then all at once he said he couldn't hold out any longer, and just took in water like a bottle and sank away to his death in the depths.

After awhile Randolph's foot touched the sand. He continued swimming in the dark until he felt his belly touch the sand. He had landed around Belle Tape Point, North of Sandy Point. He started swimming from around 10.30 pm and arrived at the Police station at 1 am. He walked along the beach and into Sandy Point by the bakery in front of

the Police station. Right away Sergeant Bridgewater called on the telephone to town, but not until the next day at 10 am did the police boat leave Basseterre to look for survivors, but nobody was found. The police sent a cable to Saba to inform the families.

I was only a boy then, but I can still recall how upset people were over this calamity. Then people here had compassion for one another, more so than today.

Randolph sold the "Eden" to Capt. Charles Barnes who lived in St. Barths for US \$2,000.—plus he got \$1,000.- to buy the motor for the "Santa Lou." He owned the "Santa Lou" from 1959 to 1966, and then lost her in Anguilla. She was a total loss. This happened on the 2nd day of January 1966. James Anthony Simmons was with him. She brought up to shore with engine, sail and everything. This happened in the night and as the beach was so white it was difficult to estimate the distance to shore. The vessel was a total loss and he had no insurance.

He then bought the 'Roselle' another sloop in Dominica from MacLawrence. He paid \$13,500.—BWI for her. In 1973 he sold her to Max Nicholson who later sold her in the Virgin Islands.

Randolph's main run used to be between Saba and St. Kitts, but he made three trips to Puerto Rico for cement, 500 bags a trip which took all of 8 to 9 days in going and coming. He was a banker, a mailman, and used to withdraw money from the banks for people here and make deposits as well. Sabans then used to bank their money with the Royal Bank of Canada and Barclays Bank on St. Kitts. Saba merchants used to deal with John Gumbs (married to three Leverock sisters from Saba. Yes all three, not together, but in some form of succession.), Sahelie and other general merchants such as S.E.L. Horsford and company which was a lumber company.

One of the boats built on Saba which Randolph remembers was the 'Augusta' built here by Horton and registered in Tortola.

He also remembers making a trip on the 'Georgetown' a 2 master Canadian built schooner around 60 to 70 tons which belonged to T.C. Vanterpool. She was first named the 'Olympic' and belonged to Capt. Lovelock Hassell who had moved to Barbados. She went ashore in Nevis in 1928, the Captain was Herman Simmons who had moved to St. Maarten and lived on the Front Street. The 'Alice' belonged to Hilvere Lawrence of Grand Case St. Martin. She was a two master schooner and was rented by the Vanterpools. She made several trips to Curacao but was not big enough for the trade. Then Captain Tommy went to Maine to buy the 'Mayflower'.

I did this interview back in 1984 and it seems like yesterday and I wrote then: "Captain Randolph still likes to sail and he goes up and down with Al and Eddie Hassell on their cargo boat the 'Brianne C.' I recently made a trip with them to St. Eustatius to attend the funeral of Mr. Vincent Astor Lopes. Randolph was in the Captains Chair and at 76 he is still quite active."

During his many years as Captain between Saba and St. Kitts he proved to be of great service to our people here on Saba. In 1976 he was decorated by H.M. the Queen for his outstanding services. A small isolated place like ours needs heroes of our own that our young people can look up to. Randolph, in our opinion, is a hero worth looking up to.

His son Willis recently passed away on Curacao. His daughter Paulette is alive and has lived all her life on St. Eustatius. He has a number of grandchildren and great grandchildren on Statia. One of his grandsons was former Commissioner Neuman Pompier. He also has a niece Mrs. Marie Senior-Hughes living in Windwardside and of

course his nieces Shirley and Yvonne Smith as well as Act. Lt. Governor Roy Smith ,all living on Saba still.

Randolph was married to Ms. Ursula Dunkin for whom the former Anglican Kindergarten was named. The street leading past his former home in The Bottom is named in his honour. I remember once some folks coming down from the USA looking up their family tree. One of the grandsons of Estelle Simmons-Vanterpool told me that his grandmother, who lived in St. Thomas, told him that if any brown skinned people claimed to be an uncle or aunt to listen to them as her father had roamed around the town quite a bit. Some days later I passed the young man on a wall sitting with Randolph with a tape recorder interviewing him. Just a few months ago the same person was back on Saba and telling me stories he had heard from his' uncle Randolph'. Many of the people whom Captain Randolph used to help are all gone now but they always talked highly of him in appreciation of his many years of dedicated service. It would be difficult to image nowadays any number of merchants from especially the Windwardside giving Randolph money to deposit in their bank accounts on St.Kitts where he also had authority to withdraw monies from their accounts and pay bills on their behalf. It was another world back then and that is not so long ago when you come to think of it. Saba remembers you Captain 'Rannie' and pride fully so.



