

**THE NEW HEBRIDES RUNS OF THE FIJIAN BURNS PHILP &
COMPANY LTD. AS AGENTS FOR A. U. S. N.
AND LATER THE U. S. S. C. OF NZ LTD.**

20 October 2010

The Sydney Morning Herald (NSW : 1842-1954)

Wednesday 30 June 1886

The new steamer Fijian, built for Mr. B. B. Nicoll, of this city, and intended for the trade between this port and Fiji, was to leave London yesterday for Launceston and Hobart with a full general cargo. She is expected to reach here by the end of August.

She arrived at Launceston and Hobart at about 4 September 1886 – Captain Peter Mowatt. She had been built by Palmers Shipbuilding and Iron Company, Ltd., of Jarrow-on-Tyne to the order of George Wallace Nicoll, Sydney.

The FIJIAN (980 tons) made her first run to Noumea, Suva & Levuka starting at Sydney on 17 September 1886. She belonged to the Sydney firm of George W. Nicoll and was mentioned as A.U.S.N. (Australasian United Steam Navigation Co.) ship in September 1887. In February 1889 she was bought by U.S.S.C. NZ Ltd. (Union Steam Ship Co. of New Zealand) for the New Hebrides Fiji run. She was lost at Tanna on 13 May 1889.

Year	SYDNEY departure	back at SYDNEY	port destination
1887	1887-10-12	1887-11-03	Noumea, Aneityum, Suva, Levuka
1887	1887-11-09	1887-12-29	Noumea, Aneityum, Suva, Levuka
1888	1888-06-10	1888-06-27	From Newcastle to NH, Noumea with 1000 to coal
FIJIAN was sold then to USSC of NZ by G.W. Nicoll			
Year	Melbourne departure	back at Melb.	port destination
1889	1889-02-16	1889-03-24	Havannah Harbour, Fiji
1889	1889-03-29	1889-04-28	Havannah Harbour, Fiji
1889	1889-05-04	-----	Didn't get along TANNA
FIJIAN became a total wreck near TANNA on 13 May 1889			

Tuesday 4 June 1889

The West Australian (Perth, WA : 1879-1954)

WRECK OF THE S.S. FIJIAN.

[BY TELEGRAPH.]

(FROM OUR CORRESPONDENT)

SYDNEY, June 3.

News has arrived of the loss of the s.s. *Fijian*, at the New Hebrides. She left Melbourne on May 4, and had an uneventful passage until the 13th, when she struck on a reef on the eastern side of the island of Tanna, about 4 o'clock in the morning. As she filled speedily, the cutter was launched, and all the passengers were put in it, and ordered to stay close at hand. The engines were then

put astern, and the boat succeeded in getting off the reefs, and she was grounded on a sandy beach. The passengers went aboard again next morning, and afterwards made a camp 12 miles distant, near a mission station, but were advised by Mr. Watts, the resident missionary, to leave soon, as they were not safe, and the natives were very savage and treacherous. The s.s. *Tenterden* afterwards picked them up and conveyed them to Sydney. When last seen, the vessel was nearly straight, and full of water.

LIVELY EXPERIENCES AMONGST SAVAGE ISLANDERS.

THE EVIDENCE AT THE ENQUIRY

[Per s.s. Te Anau, at the Bluff.]

SYDNEY, June 4.

The Union Steam Ship Company's screw-steamer Fijian, from Melbourne to the New Hebrides, was wrecked off Tanna Island on the 13th ult. She struck a reef on the eastern side of the island, but was got off on the engines being reversed. Soon after she commenced to fill, and the engines being put ahead, the steamer was taken through an opening in the reef, and grounded on a sandy bottom. The crew and passengers landed, but the natives mustered in force, and the passengers returned to the vessel. The captain sent a boat to the mission station, twelve miles away, and landed stores and requisities for a fortnight. Several natives came aboard and assisted in landing stores. By the time this work was well under way, about 300 natives had assembled, about 100 having rifles and ammunition, and others being armed with knives, spears, and tomahawks. The position of the stranded crew and passengers was anything but pleasant, as the only firearms they possessed were a Winchester rifle and a revolver belonging to the captain. The boats were hauled up near the camp, and the strength of the company was concentrated as much as possible in preparation for any hostile movement, but with some presents of tobacco to the chief, Captain Fielding secured the withdrawal of all but a few natives from the vicinity of the camp, and the party were left unmolested the night following the accident. Next morning the natives came down in larger numbers, swam off to the vessel, and began looting wholesale. Fortunately Captain Fielding had taken the precaution to knock the heads out of all the spirit casks, and as far as possible to prevent intoxicating liquor from falling into the hands of the natives. At noon on the 14th the Rev. W. Watt arrived in the mission boat, and advised that the whole party should leave the camping-place as soon as possible, as he could not guarantee their safety for five minutes, the natives of the coast being savage and treacherous. The passengers left in the mission boat, but the officers and crew had to remain in the camp until the 16th, when the steamer Tenterden called in and took the crew aboard. The natives meantime had taken everything they could find, and were gradually becoming more numerous and troublesome. The passengers were—Mr Buchanan, M.L.A., of Sydney, and daughter, Mr Spook, and Mrs Groon, a lady travelling to Fiji. The members of the ship's company saved most of their effects.

An enquiry into the cause of the wreck was opened in Sydney on the 3rd instant. Captain Fielding detailed the circumstances of the wreck, and deposed that he distinctly made an order in the night order-book, "Call me at 3.45 a.m.," prior to going below, and the sentence was undoubtedly not an after-thought. The officers had it distinctly open to them to check the courses.

Albert Duder, late chief officer of the steamer, deposed that he had the first watch previous to the vessel being wrecked. He received the night order book from Captain Fielding prior to the wreck. The first four lines were what he saw and read after having received it from Captain Fielding. He signed it by the binnacle lamp, as usual, and placed it in its customary place in the bridge-box. At present there was more writing in it than there was when he read and signed it. He said that unhesitatingly. He kept watch till midnight. The second officer then came on duty, and got the course, and was told where the book was, and that there was nothing very particular in it. He made this remark because it had always been his habit to specially mention the fact to the mate if any particular orders were in the book. The night was cloudy with a moderate trade wind and distinct objects could have been fairly well picked up. He turned in as usual and was awakened by the turning-out bell. He walked out on deck, putting on his coat as eight bells struck, and saw land ahead. He did not expect to see it, and so hurried along. Getting on the lower bridge he saw a slight break a little bit on the port bow. He ran for the upper bridge, and then sang out "Full speed astern." The second officer was then at the telegraph, and he (witness) jumped to it and rang it repeatedly. Almost immediately afterwards the ship struck. As a sailor, his impression was that on getting on deck he would have found the captain there, being so close to the land, but such was not the case. He had not the slightest idea that they would see land until next afternoon. He took a personal interest in the navigation of the ship, and worked out the sights, but he had no charts of his own. On a previous voyage, under the former captain, he saw the ship charts frequently, but under the present captain he never was invited to look at them. He was strongly under the impression that he was not welcome, and never asked to see them. The addendum made to the book was "Call me at 3.45 a.m." with a dash or stroke under. He would distinctly affirm that those words were not there when he signed, nor was it usual to see interlineations in the night order-book. After the ship struck he found the book on the captain's chest, not in its usual place, the captain having called upon him to bring it. Prior to that the captain had asked him if he had seen the special order, but witness replied, "No; I see it now, but it was not there when I signed." He believed that he distinctly looked at the book at the time, and found that the order had been afterwards inserted. It was quite possible to have in-

serted. It was quite possible to have inserted an entry, as four hours had elapsed. The captain was not at all well, and, as a matter of fact, on getting ashore he left for the mission station with the missionary, and left his officers and crew to get along as best they could amongst cannibal natives. He never had any sleep for two days and two nights on the island, but kept guard over the camp with the only rifle available in his right hand for the protection of their lives.

F. S. Harley, who relieved the chief officer, deposed that he had read the night order book distinctly, and was sure that the entry "Call me, etc.," was not there. They mistook the island for a bank of clouds and stood right on to it from a quarter past 3 to 4 o'clock. Immediately the foresail was hauled up the mistake was found out. His previous captain had voluntarily shewed the officers the charts, but the present captain had not done so from some unaccountable cause.

The look-out man also stated that he had not been informed that they were approaching land, nor did he anticipate that they were.

[A cable message has informed us that the Board suspended the certificates of the Captain and second mate for six months.]