

# The WARSPITE

by Rev C. L. Carty

The hurricane of 7 | 8 November 1984 destroyed the last remaining wooden schooner of the one-time proud fleet which for many years ploughed the seas between Anguilla and the Dominican Republic. From Anguilla, along the chain of the Eastern Caribbean to Trinidad; the WARSPITE was well known and popular.

The tales of her voyages could fill a book; the legends of her speed, mainly from St. Kitts to Anguilla and from Santo Domingo to Anguilla; the annual battle for first place when she fought the ISMAY on that last run home with her decks crowded with the men returning home from the cane fields of Macoris and La Romana; all this and so much more will live long in the memories of all who loved that sleek black ship.

It was in 1916 that my father bought a 40 ton sloop named the GAZELLE. He beached her in order to alter her bow section and adding some 11 feet to her overall length. World War One was raging in Europe and in the Royal Navy there was a famous battleship named H.M.S. WARSPITE. So what better name to give this small schooner? She was fast – so much so that her Captain once remarked that she skipped from the top of one wave to the top of the next, without bothering to use the trough!

Warspite had to transport over one hundred men to Santo Domingo and back and this meant overcrowding. So, in 1929, my father beached her again and for the

demons time added to her length by cutting her in two, separating the halves by 14 feet and re joining them with a central protein. She was now 75 feet overall, drawing 9 feet and carrying 75 tons of cargo.

Driven solely by wind power from many long years warspite finally doses to the need for auxiliary power. It may have been a proud day for Captain and crew when she first moved under diesel power, but it must have been with some resentment in the part of the renowned old ship.

One story must be told. In early 1955, on her way home from Trinidad she sprang a serious leak which her pump could not contain. She was off the grenadines and when it seemed obvious that she would sink the Captain and most of the crew towed away towards the nearest land. Her mate and one sailor refused to abandon her, and setting sail again, with her decks awash, pointed her bow towards the island of Bequia. Warspite overtook the ship's boat and was re joined by the rest of the crew, and sailed on. It was remarked that she had never sailed better. A schooner Captain and owner on shore directed the crew to the best spot for grounding her and spent himself in directing her repairs. I was then the Minister in charge of the Methodist Churches in St. Maarten | Martin, and on learning that she would sail for home on a certain date I crossed over to Anguilla to await her arrival. The very next morning she was at anchor in Road Bay, and with my brother Elliott and our uncle, we boarded her. It was my joy and privilege to gather the crew and give thanks to God.

When she was swept ashore at Sandy Ground in early November 1984 there were tears. The eyes of more than one person on that windswept beach. When she broke up my son Lenny carefully collected every bit of her and stored her remains.

So ended an era. Never again would we see home-built schooners leaving port and then later racing home again. Our waters carry sleek yachts and our own racing boats, but never again will we see the warspite, and those other schooners who sailed with her – the Ismay, Eagle, Betsey, Muriel, and all the later schooners and the many sloops.

How better to end than with the first stanza or Masefield's sea fever:

"I must go down to the seats again, to the lonely sea and the sky, And all I ask is a tall ship and a star to steer her by, And the wheel's kick and the wind's song, and the white sails shaking, And a grey mist on the sea's face and a grey dawn breaking."

(Warspite remains are presently stored among the old salt processing buildings, Sandy Ground. The Anguilla Archaeological and Historical Society has committed itself to creating some kind of memorial to this famous ship, possibly a large scale model and a museum display of some of the remaining sections and related artefacts. People wanting to help with this project are asked to contact the Society's Executive as soon as possible. )