

Tales of the *Duyfken* - The Dutch



Willem Janszoon
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OVER the next few months *Tales from the Duyfken* will be looking at Australian maritime history from a Dutch perspective. This month we look at one of the original *Duyfken* captains, Willem Janszoon.

Little is known of Willem Janszoon's early life, though it is thought that he was born around 1570.

From the records of the time it would appear that Janszoon first entered maritime service in 1598. A man then in his mid-twenties, he signed on as mate aboard the *Hollandia* for a voyage to the Dutch East Indies.

His progression through the ranks saw him take command of his own vessel in 1601, as the master of the *Lam*, one of three vessels to voyage to the East Indies at this time.

The success of this voyage saw Janszoon sail once again from the Netherlands for the East Indies. Leaving his homeland in December 1603, he did so as the captain of the *Duyfken* – the Little Dove. *Duyfken* was one of 12 ships in this great fleet heading to the East

Indies, a fleet under the command of Steven van der Hagen.

Duyfken was a small well-armed scout ship, some 20 metres in length, her role was to sail ahead of the main fleet to keep a watchful eye for Portuguese vessels who sought the same rewards that the Spice Islands had to offer. On more than the odd occasion there would be a conflict between these opposing fleets.

Having firmly established his sailing credentials and leadership qualities over a number of voyages to the East Indies, the directors of the VOC – Verenigde Oostindische Compagnie, – more commonly known as the Dutch East India Company – had grander plans for Janszoon... to sail eastward from Bantam on the western end of Java towards the coast of western New Guinea.

Sailing a square-rig ship is never easy, and is particularly more challenging when the prevailing winds are 'on the nose' that is they are blowing from the direction in which you wish to sail. Ideally to make good ground a master looks for breezes that blow from astern to take his vessel in the preferred direction.

For Janszoon the prevailing winds of the time pushed *Duyfken* across the eastern end of the Arafura Sea and on into the Gulf of Carpentaria... and in the distance the low sweep of land rising above the eastern horizon came into view.

The words from a crewman perched high above the ship's deck atop the masthead: "Landt in zicht" would ensure Janszoon and the crew of *Duyfken* a place in history. Not that they knew it, but they were now the first Europeans known to have laid eyes on the mainland of Australia.

And so this story will continue in next month's edition of *Have a Go News*.

Inspired to sail aboard the replica of *Duyfken* then go to www.duyfken.com/sailing.