

46b ["The Broome Cyclone", *The Sydney Morning Herald*, Friday 18 December 1908, page 10]

THE BROOME CYCLONE.

FIFTY LIVES LOST.

DAMAGE £20,000.

CAPTAIN GREGORY'S ESCAPE.

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The crew of Kalander Bux reached Broome yesterday greatly smashed and battered about, and are now being cared for. The storm-disturbed area extended from King's Sound to Port Hedland. The centre of the disturbance passed about 75 miles west of Roebuck Bay, striking the coast between Wallal and Banangarra Creek. The schooner Kalander Bux went ashore 45 miles south of Lagrange Bay, and became a total wreck, enormous seas breaking right over her masts. Only Captain Gregory and four of the coloured crew were saved, three whites, Millen, Tillen, and Young, being drowned. Goldstein's schooner also went ashore ten miles further on. The luggers Tasmania, Ray, Smuggler, Louisa, Gracie, Langdon, and Pet are total losses. The luggers missing are Leon, Lillie, Argon, and Welcome.

The shipping master at Broome estimates that 50 lives have been lost as the result of the hurricane. Donald Sutherland, H. Watt, and Brown are still missing. The schooner Ena has drifted into Cape Villarette Creek without being damaged. The steamer Sultan searched south as far as Point Blaze, and assistance has also been despatched from Broome and Lagrange Bay. Over 40 luggers reached Roebuck Bay in a seriously damaged condition, many being dismasted. The consensus of opinion is that the blow was much more severe than the April storm. The damage to boats and property is estimated at fully tully £20,000.

A THRILLING STORY.

Captain Gregory, who was in charge of the schooner Kalander Bux, in the course of an interview gave a graphic account of the disaster. He said:--

"On Monday, December 7, we were working off Cape Joubert. The weather looked unsettled, and the glass instead of rising to the usual point remained stationary. From that, coupled with other indications, I know that we were in for something, with night coming on. I would have gone out to sea, but was unable to signal the boats, it being very dark. At daybreak on Tuesday morning we stood for sea, signalling the boats to clear for shelter. The wind was easterly, with freshening squalls, the barometer being stationary, and the wind and sea rapidly grew worse. At 8 a.m. on Tuesday the schooner was reaching northward, close reefed fore and aft. An hour later we were struck by the first heavy squall, after which it grew rapidly worse, the glass falling, and a rapidly rising sea. At 11 o'clock we sighted a lugger to leeward, flying distress signals. We wore ship to southwards, and closed up with the lugger; but on getting down we found nothing the matter with her. We shouted instructions to the man in charge. We wore ship again northwards, the wind being north-east and blowing a whole hurricane, continuing throughout the day, and getting worse as the day passed. (At nightfall the wind, if possible, seemed to redouble its vigour, with squalls of fearful fury every half hour. The wind was then veering between NNE and NNW, the schooner being hove to under close-reefed foresail, oil bags being carried to windward through the whole night. The water became gradually shallower, and the schooner's estimated drift was SSW. By half past 2 o'clock on Wednesday morning we had shoaled to 8 fathoms, and I decided to bench the schooner at next high water, the difficulty being how to keep her off until then. Both anchors were let go, and the cable was played out to its fullest extent, with springs on both chains. The topmast was cut away, as were also the motor launches, to ease the vessel; but at 4 o'clock the anchors parted with the fury of the squall. The vessel's head was paid off to the eastward, sails were immediately set on her, and the ship wore round with her head to the north-west. The broken chains were hove to, and spare anchors bent on; but just after letting the anchors go the vessel took the ground and the seas made a clean breach over her. Both lower masts were cut away. The vessel lay over on her starboard bilge, and the whole of the vessel's timbers on the starboard side collapsed. The deck was at an angle of 80 degrees. The boat was breaking up rapidly. The coloured crew were passed into the whaleboats and dinghies, which were more or less submerged and flooded, clear of the ship. Seas smashed the after-deck-house away, and the mate, engineer, purser, and myself were thrown into the water, where we grasped pieces of wreckage. I was washed off, but again managed to get on the wreck, of which there was very little left, and found that every member of the crew was on the submerged boats or pieces of wreckage. About 20 minutes after I left the wreck, and saw the chief mate, Young, hanging on to a part of the deckhouse of about 10ft square. I shouted to him that it was still ebb tide, and he waved back, but I do not think that he heard what I said. I swam with a half-door, and got ashore at about 9 p.m., and lay down exhausted. I could not sleep, as it was raining in torrents and blowing a hurricane. I walked to the northward, it being my intention to make for Zumfeldt's station, which was about 30 miles away. Some time during the night I came across three men in the dark, and they proved to be coloured members of the crew, two being blind with the severe effects of the salt water. We proceeded to walk all through the night, lying down for an hour when it ceased raining. At about 10 o'clock on Thursday morning we saw a lugger high and dry in the distance, and finally got aboard. We all had a long drink of water, and went to sleep. At about 2 o'clock in the afternoon we again started to walk to the station, the crew of the lugger having left previously. At about 4 o'clock we saw four men in the distance. Two of them turned out to be members of the crew