

The Islands Time Forgot



The Life of Caymanian Turtle Fishermen

David Douglas Duncan Collection

from The Cayman Islands National Archive Photographic Collections

Exhibited:

16 March - 12 May, 2011 at the National Gallery

David Douglas Duncan was born in 1916 in Kansas City, Missouri and as a child displayed a keen interest in the outdoors, which is portrayed in the photographs he has taken over the years. Duncan is perhaps best known for his work as a combat photographer, but with this exhibit, we recognize him as the man who photographed the "*ironmen of the sea*".

In 1939, a chance meeting in Key West, Florida, between Captain Allie Ebanks and David Douglas Duncan led to what Duncan describes as one of the pivotal times of his life. As Cap'n Allie said to Duncan, "...the story has never been told and you'll be the first writing person to sail with us to the Mosquito Coast. Do you want to go?" As seen through his lens, Duncan joined the crew of "quiet, proud men" onboard the Schooner *Adams* on a turtling voyage to the Mosquito Cays.

Capturing Giant Turtles in the Caribbean by Duncan was published in 1943 in The National Geographic Magazine, which featured 16 images of Cap'n Allie and his crew. In 1966, in his photographic autobiography, *Yankee Nomad*, Duncan included 17 other photographs from the infamous voyage. He donated the 24 original photographs on exhibit, to the Cayman Islands National Archive (CINA) in 1999. These images are among the best photographic documentation of the life of Caymanian turtle fishermen. As noted by Duncan in the National Geographic article, "It's an old Cayman Islands custom, one that produces fine seamen and generations of captains."

The 24 images from CINA's David Douglas Duncan Collection portray the intricacies of turtling and the hardships of the voyage for the Caymanian men being away from their home and families. In the faces of Cap'n Allie and the crew one can see the "ancient profession, where a boy earned manhood upon an often empty sea."