

# Vikings land on our shores

## YUNUS RASHID

**FOR** most of last week the question was the same for everyone travelling along Queens Road past the Royal Suva Yacht Club.

Is that ship real? Is that a Viking ship anchored out therein Suva Harbour?

Cancel the eye checkup. The Vikings have landed.

But do not panic or run for your lives because these Vikings are peaceful!

At least that is what the chieftain, Borris Valentin, 32, of Denmark tries to make you believe.

The ship *Bifrost* is a replica of a longship used by 'Norseman' or 'Northman' to conquer European countries between the ninth and 11th centuries.

Floating silently in the harbour *Bifrost* looks like a ship which has travelled through the corridors of history into the 20th

It 50 feet long with a beam of 16.5 feet and a draft measuring three feet.

Keeping with ancestral tradition, Mr Valentin has given the ship a double edge and a single square sail.

But with modern day restrictions, he has had to use fibreglass coated stainless steel which gives the ship a smooth finish unlike the clinker built (with

overlapped planks) ships.

Mr Valentin said the replica was exceptionally sturdy in rough seas because of the design.

One thing on board the vessel which would have angered the original Vikings is the presence of a washroom and a temple of Hindu God Ganesh.

"I like to be clean hence the bathroom and I have stayed in India for five years and there I learnt about Ganesh who I found very impressive," Mr Valentin said.

According to the Britannica Encyclopedia Vikings played an important part in European

The book describes Vikings as members of the Scandinavian seafaring warriors who raided and colonised wide areas of Europe from the ninth century to the 11th century, profoundly affecting European history.

In movies Vikings are portrayed as warlike savages who ravaged far and wide in the north - killing, looting and conquering.

But Mr Valentin is of the view that Vikings did not massacre native people like Alexandra the Great and other conquerors.

He said Vikings assimilated with the local population and were very recep-

tive of new cultures and traditions and the Norwegian army by equipping them with military skills.

But why live like a Viking in the first place.

Perhaps Mr Valentin's father is to be "blamed" because he switched from being a dentist to becoming a professor in Viking history thus exposing his five-year-old son to horned helmets and replicas of longships and in some instances, original Viking ships.

Being a seaman by nature, Mr Valentin did not have any difficulty in deciding how to spend his inheritance after his father's death.

Before becoming a permanent seafarer in 1989, Mr Valentin was in the import export business, exporting Denmark products to India and buying silk from there.

His job took him to India where he spent five years doing business and at the same time learning the *Mahabarata* and the Hindu religion.

Mr Valentin said he was not a Hindu but believed in the elephant God Ganesh.

At the age of 27, he returned to his homeland and set about to build his dream ship.

In 1989, Mr Valentin left his country for a tour



BORRIS VALENTIN

around the world. He has visited hundreds of ports in including several ports in the United States.

Mr Valentin is a bachelor and the reason he gives for remaining so is very strange.

"I couldn't get married even if I wanted to. *Bifrost* is a very jealous lady and she does not like me to keep a mistress," he said.

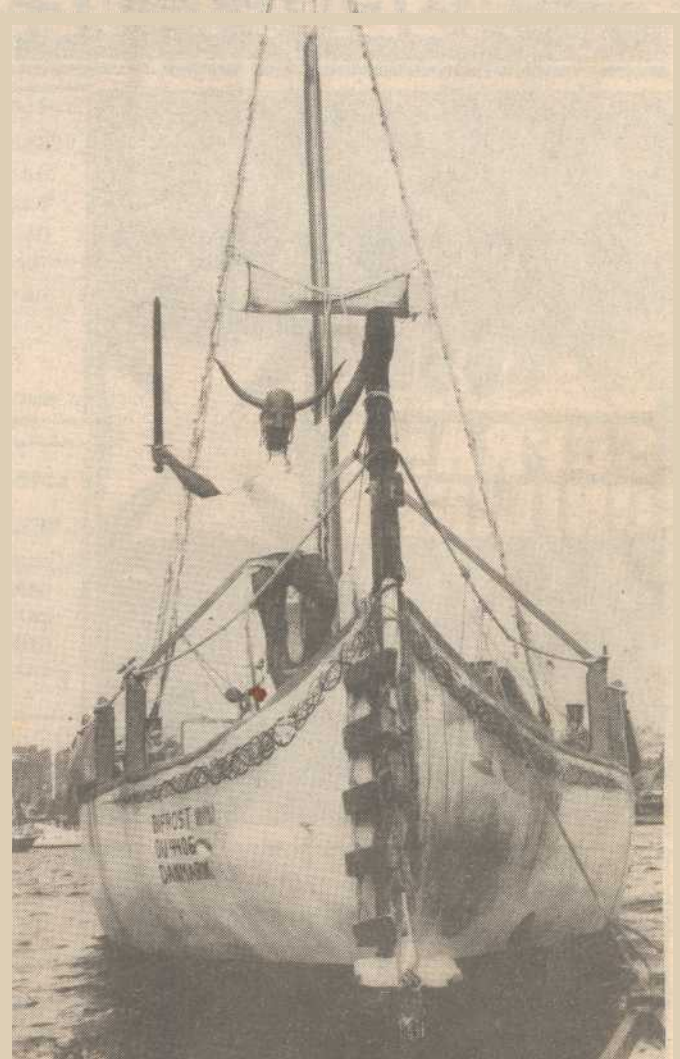
"This ship cost me all my money and time and I could never afford a wife".

Mr Valentin has equipped his ship with a 150 horsepower Perkins in board engine and modern navigational equipment.

He has built-in cabins to accommodate eight people comfortably and travels with a permanent crewman, Andy Griffith, and his pet dog, Aiko.

Temporary jobs pay for Mr Valentin's expenses.

He arrived in Fiji on Saturday last week and plans to leave in a month's time.



THE Viking ship which "invaded" Suva Harbour on Saturday last week. Borris Valentin is wearing his Viking helmet and brandishing a sword.

