

She ran gauntlet of the Rip **POLICE CHASE** **"GHOST SHIP"** **IN STRAIT**

By JOHN LLEWELLYN

FOUR armed police and six fishermen volunteers boarded a "ghost ship" in wind-swept Bass Strait yesterday afternoon.

The vessel, the £40,000 diesel luxury yacht *Watgania*, was tossing deserted off Cape Schanck after an eerie 20-mile voyage through the boiling Rip, past jagged Corsair Rock, and into Bass Strait **WITHOUT HUMAN AID.**

Photographer Keith Brown and I joined police as they leapt on to the yacht from the swaying shark-boat *Florence D*, ready to grapple with a "gang of nautical joy-riders."

Instead we found a second "*Marie Celeste*."

The yacht, owned by wealthy pastoralist, Mr. R. Barr-Smith, was completely deserted, and showed no signs of anyone having been aboard.

Unmanned and without power, she was heading towards Tasmania after vanishing from her Portsea

moorings overnight, and:

- Heading around into the boiling Rip.
- Sweeping past the wrecked freighter *Time*, on the jagged Corsair Rock.
- Rounding rugged Point Nepean.
- Sailing for more than 15 miles past the pounding surf on the Portsea-Sorrento back beaches.

Navv was **called in**

Police, convinced she was stolen, called on Flinders Naval Base for a corvette or

fast cutter to intercept her, but decided later to use a sharkboat to save steaming distance from Westernport Bay.

Melbourne radio alerted shipping to watch for the craft.

The mystery of her break-away from Portsea was solved when the boarding party hauled up the trailing mooring chain—and found the bottom link missing.

Captain Anderson said: "The shackle probably parted somewhere about midnight—and the ebb tide with an offshore set did the rest."