Luis Vaez De Torres Encyclopedia Article

Luis Vaez De Torres

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Contents

Luis Vaez De Torres Encyclopedia Article.....1

Contents.....2

Luis Vaez De Torres.....3

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?-1613

Spanish navigator who became the first to sail through the strait later named after him, which separates New Guinea from Australia. A ship's captain in the fruitless 1605-1606 South Seas expedition led by Pedro Fernandez de Quirós (1565-1614), Torres and his men were abandoned in what is now Vanuatu by their leader, who inexplicably sailed back to Mexico without them. At that time point Torres opened sealed orders from the Viceroy of Peru, directing him to head for the Philippines. In so doing, he sailed along the southern coast of New Guinea, a route made dangerous by the many reefs and shifting currents along the 90-mile-wide (145 km) passage. During this time, Torres may have glimpsed Australia, making him only the second European to do so, after Willem Jansz (b. 1570) a few months earlier. Due to Spanish security concerns, the strait was kept a secret for more than a century, but in 1762 a British hydrographer named it after Torres.