

RIVER BOATS RESCUE MAROONED SHEEP:

For the first time in living memory all the rivers flowing into the Murray are in flood together and thousands of head of sheep have been drowned - thousands more are isolated. A.N.A. pilots keep watch on normal passenger flights reporting marooned sheep to Mildura where the headquarters of Operations Rescue are centred. Reports go to Captain Brick Pollard, skipper of the paddle steamer, Success. Right now he's re-naming her. The old lady of the river sets sail -- a picturesque craft fighting the swollen stream on a mercy mission. Success was built 70 years ago but now there's a new note of urgency in the thrash of her paddles.

She's too late to save these sheep and they are but a few of the thousands drowned as the flooded rivers rose and cut them off from higher ground. But those that have escaped await rescue, often on isolated hillocks whose grass has been eaten out. Small boats put ashore to bring the sheep to loading places - valuable stock that must perish as the flood waters rise. Graziers are still trying to estimate their losses for the work of rescue is slow. The sheep that have survived the flood are spread far and wide on tiny islands surrounded by muddy, ever-deepening waters -- for this is the vast plains country of the south west. Crews of the small boats search the shore line for signs of more sheep.

The rescued are brought to the landing stage where they are emptied out to be driven aboard Noah's Ark - and safety. Valuable animals these, carrying heavy fleeces. There's food for them too -- fresh feed for sheep that might beaten the flood - and then starved to death. The old lady of the river paddles back with them -- one of her strangest voyages ever. Out of danger now - so it's abandon ship - and watch the jelly jumbucks jump. That's one billabong they're glad to be away from. And Noah's Ark is going back for more -- into an area where the rivers the only road.

EXCLUSIVE: Length: 230'

