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THE SYDNEY TO HOBART 1998
"MIDNIGHT SPECIAL"

SATURDAY 26 DECEMBER 1998

- 1300 START IN SYDNEY HARBOUR A GOOD ONE. OUT OF THE HEADS IN 40th PLACE , UP WITH THE SPINAKER AND OFF WE GO.....JUST LIKE IN THE BROCHURE.
- 1800 ABEAM OF WOLLONGONG , HAD DINNER AND SETTLED IN FOR A GREAT NIGHTS SAIL. WIND STAYED IN ALL NIGHT AT 20 TO 25 KNOTS FROM THE NORTH-EAST. FANTASTIC.

SUNDAY 27 DECEMBER 1998

- 0800 WE HAD SETTLED INTO OUR WATCHES. I WASN'T UP TO BREAKFAST SO THE BACON AND EGG SLICE WAS HANDED ROUND TO THOSE WHO WANTED IT.
- 1200 ABEAM OF GABO ISLAND. WHAT A GREAT RUN, 23 HOURS AND INTO BASS STRAIT. THE WIND HAD GRADUALLY SWUNG TO THE WEST AS FORECAST AND WAS VARIABLE FOR A TIME THEN SETTLED TO 25 KNOTS FROM THE WEST, SEAS CHOPPY. WE WERE HANDLING THIS EASILY AND AS THE WIND BUILT WE GRADUALLY REDUCED SAIL TO SUIT THE CHANGING WIND SPEED.
- 1500 WE WERE STARTING TO FEEL THE FULL FORCE OF THE WIND AND THE SEAS HAD RISEN TO HUGE SWELLS WITH BREAKING TOPS. WE ASSESSED THE SITUATION AND CAME UP WITH TWO ALTERNATIVES; THE FIRST, HEAD DUE SOUTH WITH THE WIND AND SEAS ON THE BEAM-NEAREST SHELTER FLINDERS ISLAND 150 MILES. THE ALTERNATIVE, TURN AROUND AND HEAD DUE NORTH WITH THE WIND AND SEAS ON THE BEAM-NEAREST SHELTER GABO ISLAND 30 MILES. WE CHOSE THE LATTER.
- 2000 AFTER EXPERIENCING SEVERAL SEVERE KNOCK DOWNS WE WERE FINALLY OVERCOME BY A LARGE WAVE WITH BREAKING TOP WHICH ROLLED THE BOAT TO STARBOARD SNAPPING THE MAST AT THE GOOSENECK AND BELOW THE FIRST SPREADER AS THE BOAT ROLLED THROUGH 360 DEGREES.
- DURING THE PERIOD PRIOR TO BEING ROLLED THE ONLY SAIL WE HAD HOISTED WAS THE STORM JIB. WITH ONLY THIS SMALL SAIL WE WERE STILL ACHIEVING AVERAGE SPEEDS OF 9 KNOTS. THE MAIN WAS SLABBED ONTO THE BOOM.
- AS A RESULT OF BEING ROLLED, AFTER A QUICK HEAD COUNT, WE FOUND THE FOLLOWING DAMAGE; THE CABIN TOP ON THE PORT SIDE WAS STOVE IN. THE TOP EDGE OF THE CABIN HAD INVERTED, THERE WAS A LARGE HOLE APPROXIMATELY ONE METER LONG IN THE CABIN TOP JUST BEHIND THE BULKHEAD WHERE THE FRONT WINDOW HAD BEEN. THE CABIN TOP AFT OF THIS HOLE WAS COLLAPSED LEAVING THE SECOND AND THIRD WINDOWS (WINDOW FRAMES IN PLACE BUT GLASS/LEXEN!!! BROKEN) LYING IN THE HORIZONTAL PLANE AND THE TIMBERWORK AT THE TOP OF THE COMPANIONWAY WAS SMASHED. THIS MADE INSTALLING THE TOP WASHBOARD AN IMPOSSIBILITY. THE CABIN WAS AWASH WITH APPROXIMATELY 30cm OF WATER. THE TILLER WAS BROKEN OFF LEAVING ONLY A 25 cm STUMP ON THE RUDDER HEAD. IMPOSSIBLE TO IMPROVISE ANY STEERING, TOO MUCH TORQUE.

BY 2300 WE HAD ACTIVATED THE EPIRB, BAILED THE CABIN, PLUGGED THE HOLES WITH A SPINAKER AND SLEEPING BAGS, CUT THE RIG FREE AND CUT ALL SHEETS AND HALYARDS. THE HELM WAS LASHED WITH THE MAINSHEET TO THE MAINSHEET WINCHES. STEERING JUST A LITTLE OFF TO STARBOARD WITH THE ENGINE ENGAGED AT LOW REVS WE WERE HEADING SOUTH WEST INTO THE SWELLS QUITE COMFORTABLY, EXPOSING THE UNDAMAGED SIDE OF THE CABIN TOP TO THE SWELL AND BREAKING WAVES. WE WERE APPROXIMATELY 5 MILES OFF GABO ISLAND LIGHT, FLARES HAD BEEN LAUNCHED AND A TORCH USED TO HIGHLIGHT OUR POSITION. THIS LIGHT (CONSTANT) WAS MISTAKEN FOR A SEARCH AND RESCUE BOAT. WE QUICKLY MOVED AWAY FROM THIS LIGHT IN AN EASTERLY DIRECTION EVEN THOUGH OUR HEADING WAS SOUTH WEST.

MONDAY 28 DECEMBER 1998

0230 A WATCH WAS MAINTAINED UNTIL THIS TIME HOWEVER EXPOSURE BECAME A PROBLEM AND AFTER THIS TIME ALL NINE CREW SECURED THEMSELVES BELOW AS COMFORTABLY (NOT) AS POSSIBLE. THROUGHOUT THE NIGHT THE YACHT WAS CONSTANTLY THREATENED BY SWELLS AND BREAKING WAVES. THE SPINAKER BLOCKING THE HOLE IN THE CABIN TOP WAS LOST AND SLEEPING BAGS WERE AGAIN USED TO FILL THE VOID.

0430 A PLANE WAS HEARD OVERHEAD AND FLARES WERE FIRED. THE PLANE RESPONDED WITH LANDING LIGHTS AND THEN FLEW ON.

0500 THE SOUTH CARE HELICOPTER ARRIVED AND AFTER SOME TIME AN UNDERSTANDING OF THE SIGNALS BECAME CLEAR. THE FIRST CREWMEMBER, UNDER INSTRUCTIONS FROM THE HELICOPTER CREW, JUMPED INTO THE WATER BEHIND THE BOAT AND IN NO TIME AT ALL BECAME SEPERATED FROM US BY QUITE A DISTANCE-APPROXIMATELY 100 METERS BY THE TIME THE DIVER FINALLY CONNECTED WITH HIM. AS THIS FIRST LIFT WAS TAKING PLACE, WITH TWO CREW IN THE COCKPIT AND SIX BELOW DECKS THE YACHT WAS OVERCOME BY A WAVE WHICH ROLLED THE BOAT UPSIDEDOWN WHERE IT REMAINED FOR QUITE SOME TIME. THE TWO CREW IN THE COCKPIT WERE SECURED BY THEIR HARNES'S WHICH THEY WERE UNABLE TO RELEASE DUE TO PRESSURE--THEY WERE DROWNING.

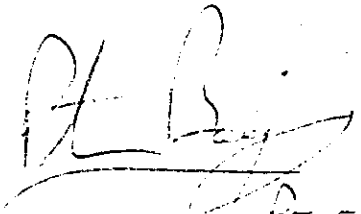
THE SIX CREW INSIDE THE UPTURNED HULL DID A HEADCOUNT, OBSERVED THE WATER DEPTH AS WAIST DEEP AND LOOKED TO THE COMPANIONWAY AS THE MEANS OF ESCAPE. ONE CREWMEMBER ATTEMPTED TO DIVE THROUGH THE HATCH BUT WAS UNSUCCESSFUL DUE TO THE HALYARDS TANGLING HIM AND HIS LIFE VEST'S POSATIVE BUOYANCY MAKING IT AN IMPOSSIBLE TASK. THANKFULLY THE NEXT WAVE ROLLED THE BOAT UPRIGHT (GIVING US OUR SECOND COMPLETE 360 DEGREE ROLL FOR THE NIGHT) TOTAL TIME INVERTED APPROXIMATELY 20 SECONDS.

THE CREW ALL GATHERED IN THE COCKPIT, ONE WAS TRAPPED OUTSIDE THE LIFELINES UNDER THE BOOM AND HIS HARNES HAD TO BE CUT TO BRING HIM BACK ON BOARD.. HE HAD SUSTAINED A BROKEN NOSE, HEAD GASH AND SWALLOWED SOME WATER.

A TOTAL OF FIVE CREW WERE LIFTED AND THE HELICOPTER DEPARTED

0600 THE VICTORIAN POLICE HELICOPTER ARRIVED AND THE REMAINING FOUR CREW WERE LIFTED OFF. THERE WERE DIFFERENT METHODS OF RETRIEVAL USED BY THE HELICOPTER CREWS; THE SOUTH CARE TEAM INSTRUCTED THE YACHT CREW TO JUMP INTO THE WATER THEN THEY WINCHED DOWN THEIR SWIMMER AND TRIED TO JOIN UP WITH THE CREW MEMBER. THIS TOOK PLACE UP TO 100 METRES FROM THE BOAT. BY COMPARISON THE VICTORIAN POLICE METHOD SAW THE SWIMMER WINCHED DOWN TO THE WATER THEN DRAGGED TO WITHIN 5 METRES OF THE STERN OF THE YACHT. THE SWIMMER THEN INSTRUCTED THE YACHT CREWMAN TO JUMP IN. THE SHORT SWIM, THEN HARNESSING SAW THE YACHT CREWMAN IN THE WATER FOR APPROXIMATELY 15 TO 30 SECONDS.

0630 WITH ALL FOUR CREW ABOARD WE HEADED FOR MALACOOTA, THIS TOOK 45 MINUTES AS IN THE NIGHT WE HAD DRIFTED 55 MILES EAST OF GABO ISLAND. THE FIVE OTHER CREW WERE FLOWN TO MERIMBULA AND WE WERE REUNITED LATER THAT AFTERNOON AFTER THE RED CROSS AND S.E.S. HAD DONE A MARVELOUS JOB IN GETTING US DRY, WARM, FED, CLOTHED AND IN CONTACT WITH OUR LOVED ONES. A FANTASTIC JOB DONE BY ALL THESE PEOPLE.


PETER BARNES
4 Jan 1999.

Midnight Special 1998 SYDNEY TO HOBART RACE Roger Barnett

The decision to compete in the race was taken much earlier in the year when a couple of the owners suggested that doing a Sydney to Hobart would be a fitting finale to a great year of sailing. We had competed successfully in the Sydney to Mooloolaba race, the Brisbane to Gladstone, the Airlie Beach race and the Hamilton Island race week.

With some misgivings, the boat was prepared for the race. From previous races on the boat I know the preparations were meticulous and all equipment on the boat was thoroughly checked. A new and stronger rudder was also fitted. We had sailed the boat in what seemed at the time severe conditions, (nothing to what we later experienced) and I was quite confident in the design and structural integrity of the boat.

We got a fantastic start with Peter Carter helming and Ian Griffiths calling the shots. We tacked out to the rounding mark of South Head and then set a spinnaker in the fresh north-easterly breeze, sailing pretty much along the rhumb line down the coast. The forecast was for a strong change during the first night. This did not eventuate and we carried the north-easterly all the way to the Gabo Island, on the Victorian-NSW border. At no stage were any Met. Bureau warnings given about the conditions we were about to encounter. This was confirmed by a commander of the R.A.N on Channel Ten news on the 30-12-1998.

At approximately 10 am on Sunday 27th we were abeam of Gabo Island and headed out into Bass Strait on starboard tack. We kept going into increasingly severe conditions and building seas until about 3 pm when the decision was made to return to the lee of Gabo Island. We were getting reports of wind strengths in our area of 75-80 knots and I advised the radio relay vessel of our decision to seek shelter.

A number of injuries had already been sustained on board at this stage, due to the severity of the wave induced knockdowns we had suffered. It was almost impossible to brace ourselves below to prevent being hurled across the cabin due to the force and violence of the knockdowns.

At this stage we were forereaching under storm jib alone, but unfortunately only the port sheet had been attached to the sail. Neil Dickson went to the mast to attach the other sheet, but due to the conditions at the time this could not be done, as the leeward side and foredeck were far too exposed and dangerous. It was decided to tack the boat and try to attach the sheet with the jib backed and this was successfully done. Our course back to Gabo was approximately due north, but this could not be achieved. The best we could do was between 30 and 60 degrees. Conditions by now were extremely perilous and we had some wild surfs down enormous waves and several knockdowns. I estimated the seas height between trough and crest to be the same as a three story building, and inside the boat the injury rate started to rise, with us all experiencing some very bad falls during the knockdowns.

At this point it is worth mentioning the skills of our helmsmen, Peter Carter, David Leslie and Bill Butler. Their abilities and quick reactions on the tiller saved us on innumerable occasions.

We had only two people in the cockpit, one steering and the other sitting behind the helmsman to call the dangerous conditions.

During the day and night we saw flares being fired from a distance, but could do nothing to assist as we were in a survival situation ourselves. Our V.H.F radio antenna, lifebuoys and danbuoy had been swept away by seas breaking over the boat.

At about 11 pm I was resting in the forepeak when I felt and heard an enormous explosion. It was a bright white flash and my first thought was that we had been hit by lightning. I still don't know what the flash was, but I did receive a blow to my forehead. The boat rolled rapidly through 360 degrees and came up minus the mast. Those below came up to the sight of the broken mast lying across the deck to windward. Tools and a knife were passed up and the rigging was disconnected and we cut through all the halliards etc that we could. The boat was bucket bailed and we were relieved to find no major structural damage to the hull itself, although the cabin had suffered damage. Holes were plugged with spinnakers and sleeping bags, The E.P.I.R.B. was activated and lashed in the cockpit and the liferaft prepared for immediate use if needed.

The falling rig had destroyed the tiller, so we had no steering although the rudder and shaft were intact. A jury rigged steering system was tried but was not effective. All the electronics and radios had failed due to water damage, so we had no communications. We also fired a few flares in case there was any shipping that could have assisted us. For the rest of the night we huddled below, all of us very cold, tired, wet through and nursing various injuries. Including broken ribs, concussion's, a broken leg, crushed 6 vertebra and minor abrasions. It was a very unpleasant night with huge seas breaking right over the boat.

At dawn we heard the sound of an aircraft that made some passes over us. It was with an overwhelming sense of relief that we knew help was on the way. Shortly after a helicopter arrived and we started to leave the boat. The helicopter had taken one person with the rest of us below and two in the cockpit. A huge wave hit us and again the boat rolled right over although this time it did not right itself immediately and stayed up side down. The entrance to the cabin was damaged and could not be opened. I remember standing on the cabin ceiling with the water rising past my knees and waist as it came through the smashed cabin windows and other holes. For me that was the worst moment, realising that unless the boat righted itself we would be drowned. After what seemed an eternity the boat sluggishly rolled itself upright again and we could get ourselves out into the cockpit. The Southcare helicopter took five of us off, and then a Victorian Police helicopter arrived to get the other four. We had to jump into the water and let the boat drift away and then a helicopter crewman was winched down from a great height because of the size of the waves. He attached a sling and we were winched up. The floor of that helicopter was the finest thing I have ever sat on in my life! I would like to pay a special tribute to these rescue crews. Their expertise and professionalism is of the very highest order. We were flown to Merimbula Airport where ambulances were waiting to take us to the hospital where we had a warm shower and some food and a hot drink. We left everything except what we were wearing at the time on the boat. And so we were extremely grateful to St. Vincent De Paul who provided clothing for us. Everyone was extremely kind and generous and I thank them sincerely.

SOME THOUGHTS ON SAFETY

1/ SAFETY HARNESS

It is usually impossible to travel the length of the boat along the jackstays because you have to unclip to get past another person, sheet, or obstacle. This is a time of extreme risk where you have to unclip and re-attach somewhere else. A double tether would solve this, but introduces other risks if the harness needs to be released quickly. The clips also need a fundamental re-design as they are impossible to release under load and usually need two hands to release the safety mechanism.

2/ RADIOS

I believe all radios should be built into waterproof cabinets, with waterproof microphones. The water in the boat saturated all our radios at the first rollover. All switch panels, battery switches etc should be waterproof both front and back. Yachts should also carry two waterproof hand held VHF radio to enable communications with other boats and rescue authorities. These radios should also have spare charged batteries.

3/ WATERPROOF CLOTHING

In a race of this nature only the best will do. There is no place for old or flimsy waterproofs. It can make the difference between a functioning crew member and a case of hypothermia.

4/ PERSONAL EPIRBs

I believe it is a good idea for all crew members to carry a personal EPIRB in case of going overboard. Rescue by the yacht would be impossible in the conditions we experienced.

5/ INFLATABLE LIFE JACKETS

I wore an inflatable life jacket over my waterproofs. It was comfortable to wear and did not interfere with the working of the boat. It provided good buoyancy in the water and did not restrict my swimming and movements.

6/ STROBES

Some of us carried a combination strobe light and torch. The torch was very useful cleaning the rig during the night and the strobe invaluable if we had gone overboard during the race.



MOOLOOLABA RADIO & SERVICES
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COMMUNICATION EQUIPMENT SALES & SERVICE
INFLATABLE BOAT SALES & REPAIRS

8-1-99

NOEL

AS I REPORTED EARLIER, WE EXPERIENCED FLARE FAILURES DURING OUR RECENT SYDNEY-HOBART RACE EXPERIENCES. OUR FLARE KIT COMPLIED WITH A.T.F. CAT 1 AND WERE ALL CURRENT NORABEL HANSEN FLARES.

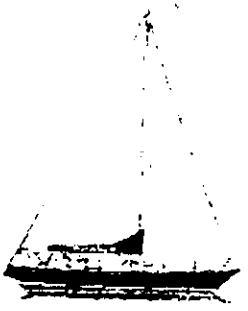
WE HAD 2 PARACHUTE FLARE FAILURES AND ONE RED H/HELD FAILURE.

THE PARA FLARES FAILED IN THE TRIGGER MECHANISM AND THE HAND HELD ONLY PARTLY IGNITED AFTER AN "EXPLOSION" THAT I FELT AT THE TIME HAD BURNED MY HAND. I FIRED THE HAND HELD, AND ONE PARA WHICH WORKED. OTHER CREWMEMBERS FIRED THE PARAS.

OUR RECOLLECTION IS A LITTLE VAGUE AS TO THE ORDER IN WHICH THEY WERE FIRED. WE FIRED APPROX 12 FLARES IN TOTAL.

REGARDS

ROGER.



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28th January, 1999.

Q.100

The Sydney-Hobart Yacht Race is one of the few remaining long distance ocean races available to a amateur crew and should remain so, but it must be remembered that it is an off-shore race and not a coastal race. Safety, weather forecasting and yacht and crew preparation have to be of the highest standard and should be scrutineered very closely to maintain that standard.

Q. 101

1. Yacht construction and interior accommodation needs to be policed. i.e. Cabin handholds
 Deck/cabin top failure
 Saloon bunks need to be secured
 No loose items in cabin
 Protection for Navigation area
2. Complete crew and yacht should be required to do a qualifying passage, including demonstration of ability to fit storm sails at sea.
3. Storm sails as per A.Y.F rule book are too big.
4. Standard life jackets (Just to fit the rule) are inadequate in storm conditions. .
5. Safety harness/tether requirements as per the rule are inadequate unless properly adjusted. Personal crew harnesses custom fitted should be mandatory.
6. Each crewmember should carry their own personal safety equipment e.g. Strobe, Epirb, Knife at all times. Knife should be worn on outside of foul weather gear as to be easily accessible at all times.
7. Release of information to the media and/or family should be more closely controlled. My wife was informed that our yacht had sunk and that I had been lifted off when in fact I believe that I was on a sinking yacht waiting for a helicopter at that time.

Signed

Neil Dickson. Crew member Yacht Midnight Special
 Assoc Dip Engineering (Elect)
 Sailmaker
 AYF Yachtmaster (Offshore)
 AYF Yachtmaster Instructor (Offshore)
 Master Class 5

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ADDENDUM TO CYCA REPORT - "MIDNIGHT SPECIAL"
(PERSONAL OPINIONS - DAVID LESLIE)

Suggestions others may make that I think are worth including:

Boat design for safety:- exterior design, stability, scantlings, I will leave to experts. Interior design needs improvement in regulations viz bunks, especially in main cabin, must be secure places - why not seatbelts, using diver's belts (cars and aeroplanes have to have them!)? Projections from underside of deck eg. bolt heads must be outlawed. Restraint belts at galley and nav station should be compulsory.

Weather reporting:- Could we not institute a system within Offshore Sailing Instructions, wherein Race Control might declare a situation of eg. "Severe Conditions", and invite weather reports, perhaps in established format, from strategically-positioned boats eg. front of fleet/back of fleet, windward/leeward. Such a system would have greatly assisted single-station weather forecasting in this last Race; it seemed that whenever a yacht gave a seamanlike report of such weather, this was suppressed by Race Control.

Medical Kit Contents:- I think materials for splinting broken limbs should be a requirement eg. several cut-down plumbers plastic pipe half-sections.

Survival Gear:- I am sure this will be addressed but it seems to me that a two-strap long/short harness system should be compulsory, as should much higher-standard life jackets, for the Sydney/Hobart Race.

