

THE CAPE TIMES

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Ocean fame

ALTHOUGH Cape Town is one of the world's key seaports, maritime affairs often seem remote from the community life of suburbia and industry, intent on their own affairs. But for the past three weeks the city has probably never been so intimately close to the "wide blue yonder" of the ocean—thanks to that 29-year-old Highvelder Bruce Dalling and his Knysna-built yacht Voortrekker. Somehow this rugged young Springbok with a blond beard and a piercing Sir Francis Drake look has captured the imagination of the nation. Again and again he has even chased the Lions from newspaper front pages, and on Thursday, as tension mounted, thousands of transistor radios blared in city offices and the inroads into business efficiency caused by the lonely little white ship on the last straight into Newport rivalled that of a mid-week Test at Newlands.

The same sort of thing has been going on since June 1 on both sides of the Atlantic, as the South African image has been brightened by the most positive sort of publicity. Although he failed to get in first, Bruce Dalling's second place puts him firmly beside Dr. Chris Barnard and Gary Player as a folk hero for millions beyond our borders. And the most significant thing about their achievements is that they are neither politicians nor professional men. They have gained respect for South Africa by performance only, by doing to perfection a job where the fame involved was only incidental to the skill and courage required. This kind of world recognition cannot be bought for money.

The sea still plucks deep atavistic chords in our consciousness. There is no practical reason in the jet air age why sensible folk should go adventuring on the oceans, but it is obvious that the urge to do so—directly and singlehandedly, or even vicariously from an armchair—is ineradicably part of human nature. It is man's visible need for struggle; for a return to the saga; for the satisfaction of combat—rising in rebellion against the too-cosy languors of the welfare state.

Although Bruce Dalling has won his personal fame on the stormy North Atlantic, he was not unconscious of his duty to the country which had made his adventure possible by generous help in cash and kind. He showed this in the amusing, yet dignified and manly, speech he made when he left South Africa in Voortrekker from Granger Bay in March. He ended with the pledge: "Win or lose, this boat is going to win friends for South Africa." He has kept his promise.