

Tribune's Cariad survives killer storm



**DOUG
TARBET**
the Tribune
man on Cariad
tells the story

THE CARIAD I limped into Table Bay yesterday minus her topmast after sailing through heaving seas which sank the Dutch oil-rig supply vessel, Smit-Lloyd 102, with the loss of five lives off the east coast near Port Elizabeth.

The whole oil-rig tender was blown apart by a freak 15-metre wave in the dying hours of 1970 just 176km from where Cariad was lying hove to being battered by winds gusting at nearly 100kmh and four and a half metre waves smashed off the top of eight metre swells.

The storm started quietly enough soon after we had seen the little Smit-Lloyd loading along the coast to Port Elizabeth. Nearly 50km south of Plettenberg Bay Cariad was using her engine to keep her thrusting into the teeth of a force four south-wester when the six-man port watch came on duty at 10pm on Wednesday. It was a black night.

As the wind built up to force seven the Cariad began rolling and pitching heavily in the steep swell with an ugly cross sea running. Then it began to rain.

By 2am we were heaving to on board of nearly 50 kmh and the wind was slashing at the waves ripping at foaming back crests just discernible in the evening glow of our navigation lights.

Shambles

Photographer Robert D'Avico of the starboard watch was about to relieve me at the wheel on Cariad's exposed after deck when the first wave smashed over us. It came out of the darkness and Robert saw it first. He dived into the protection of the chart-room. My feet were swept from under me as the wave creamed along the after deck, and only my hands caught at



NIGEL AYLES . . .
leading a charmed life.

the spokes of the steering wheel. Below deck was a shambles. Crockery was hurled from the galley. Crewman Alan Richards was catapulted four metres across his cabin from his bunk as Cariad rolled violently. Only a reflex lurchy roll saved him from serious injury as he crashed into the side of the cabin.

Black eye

On deck Nigel Ayles was nearly hanged as a wind-whipped sail flung a rope round his neck and lifted him off his feet. Minutes later he and navigator, Mike Brown, struggled to secure a spar, were swept from their feet and hurled metres down the deck. As the wind shrieked in the rigging Jim Capstick, harnessed to the wheel, was buried waist deep in swirling water as another wave swept over Cariad.

Crewman Warren Dale collected a black eye from a thick rope whiplashing in the wind, and our starboard navigation light was lifted from its socket and smashed.

The sun blew itself out about noon on Thursday and Cariad was sailing again four hours later.

Later that day our radio picked up the yacht Mercury asking permission to enter Mossel Bay for repairs. We also spoke to the skipper of Eclipse,



KRASNI SUTIC . . .
pleased with yacht and crew.

another Rio race yacht, and learned that he, too, had to ride out the storm although 96km nearer the Cape.

However, yesterday provided another morning of ill-luck when Cariad lost her top mast and Genoa jib in a freak accident off Cape Point.

The youngest crewman on Cariad, Trevor Richards (15), of Pretoria, was washed overboard. Alan Dunbar dived overboard with a lifeline and brought the youth back to the boat after they had spent 20 minutes in the water waiting for the Cariad to be brought about.

Although the Genoa jib was salvaged, it has been badly torn. The damage to the top mast and Genoa is a serious blow to the Cariad, and unless immediate repairs can be carried out in Cape Town, there is a possibility that she will be prevented from taking part in the race to Rio.

The yacht was racing at seven knots through a force three wind off Cape Point early under Genoa jib, foresail and mizzen when a 25mm steel hook connecting the running back stay to the top of the mast straightened.

Delighted

There was a tremendous crack and the whole lot went, said Jim Capstick, who was at the helm at the time. The 10-metre topmast went over the side, dragging the huge Genoa with it.

Sutic, however, was delighted at Cariad's performance. He said: "In her original form she was known to be very good in that sort of weather, but I was a bit worried about the structural changes we had made. There were no plans to go by, and we might have changed her characteristics — particularly with the mizzen mast — but she handled beautifully. I sat for a couple of hours watching the mizzen, but we didn't even have to reef the sail."

"The crew was magnificent. I did notice awe on a few faces at the size of the waves, but there was no sign of panic at all. After the first green wave came crashing over the decks I made sure every man who took the wheel had a safety belt on."

From Port Elizabeth, it is reported that the captain and four members of the crew are believed to be missing from the Smit-Lloyd 102 which was wrecked about 10 miles on the Port Elizabeth side of the Storms River mouth, on Old Year's Eve at about 6.30.

According to a woman who spoke to two rescued men (Johannes Brenkelman and Krel Kaca, both of Rotterdam) in Humansdorp Hospital soon after they were brought there, in a shocked and scratched condition, they said they held out little hope for the other five crew members including the captain.

Brenkelman and Kaca were probably the only people on deck. In a dramatic bid to save themselves they managed to launch a dinghy and struggled ashore through mountainous waves and surf.

Once ashore, they staggered exhausted to a holiday cottage and were then rushed to hospital.



TREVOR RICHARDS (right) the youngest member of the Cariad's crew, who was washed overboard near Cape Point yesterday, holds on to Alan Dunbar's shoulder as the pair wait for the Cariad to come about and pick them up. Dunbar dived into the heaving seas with a lifeline to save Trevor.

(Pictures by ROBERT D'AVICO)



MEMBERS of the Cariad crew work to free the splintered remains of the top mast which was torn away off Cape Point yesterday.