

PIONIER CREW COULD HAVE LIVED 6 WEEKS

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CREW MEMBERS of the Rio race yacht Pionier, which sank after hitting a whale, believe they could have stayed alive on their small rubber liferaft for about six weeks.

This is the opinion of the sloop's skipper, Gordon Webb, who arrived back in Cape Town with his crew last night in the American cargo ship Potomac.

Webb and his crew — Jenifer Webb, Willi Schutten, Peter Flockemann and Tony Keeney—were picked up by the 13 858-ton bulk carrier about 1 450 miles north-west of Cape Town after spending 16 hours in their raft.

Pionier sank in 2 800 fathoms during the early hours of last Thursday.

SLIM CHANCE

Beaming with the excitement after arriving home, Gordon Webb said: 'It was a million-to-one chance us hitting a whale . . . but our rescue was a miracle.'

Between hand shaking and hugging and kissing of friends and relatives on the quay, they managed to answer questions from the battery of newspaper, radio, newsreel and television men.

Webb said that although the yacht sunk within 15 minutes they had managed to send out a distress signal and load the craft with plenty of water, warm clothing and food.

'We realised we were way off the shipping lanes and resigned ourselves to the thought of a long time adrift,' he said.

EAGLE-EYED

He said they could have stayed alive for about six weeks on the supplies they had aboard.

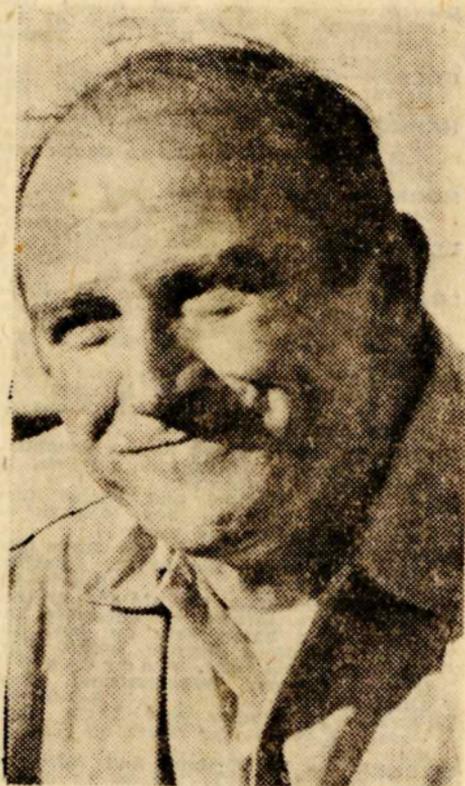
Referring to their rescue, Mr. Webb and Mr. Flockemann said they owed their lives to the eagle-eyed third officer of the Potomac, Roy Newkirk.

Mr. Newkirk was just about to go off watch when he noticed the tiny orange raft bobbing in the water about three miles off the port bow.

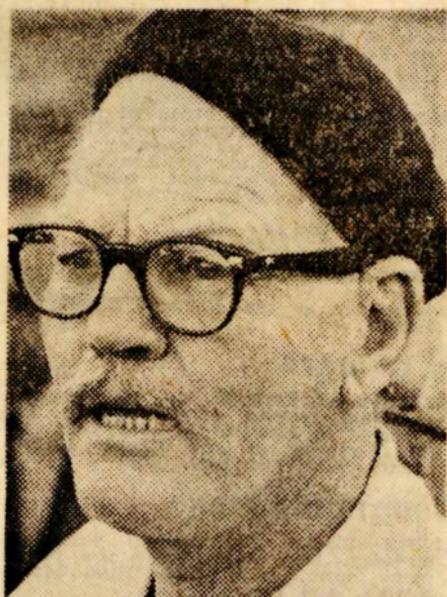
The American seaman immediately requested permission from the master to alter course and investigate.

Discussing his immediate plans, Mr. Webb said he and his family hoped to get a booking to fly to Rio de Janeiro for the finish of the race . . . 'although we would prefer to have another yacht to set off after the fleet.'

The owner of the uninsured R20 000 ocean-racer, Mr. Willi Schutten, said his main aim was to start raising funds to build a new yacht . . . for racing.



ALTHOUGH Willi Schutten suffered a personal financial loss of R20 000 when his yacht Pionier sank he was all smiles on arriving back home.



MAN responsible for the rescue of the Pionier's crew . . . eagle-eyed third officer of the Potomac, Roy Newkirk.

From the archives of Richard Crockett & Sailing Publications.

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