

Heath: 'It was very frightening'



The broken mast of the English yacht "Kukri" which was taking part in the race, towers over four of the crew members as they tidy their belongings at Crosshaven, Co. Cork, yesterday. ('Examiner')



Three of the crew of "Silver Apple of the Moon" relaxing at the R.C.Y.C., Crosshaven, yesterday, after their harrowing ordeal in the race in which they sailed under the Swiss flag. They are (from left): Grattan Roberts, a solicitor in Cork; Toby Rickardson, from Sydney, Australia and Robin Hennessy, an Aer Lingus pilot. Grattan Roberts is a descendant of Comdr. Richard d'Esterre Roberts of Passage West who on 'The Sirius' made the first crossing of the Atlantic by steamship.

FORMER Prime Minister Edward Heath, whose yacht Morning Cloud was savaged in the fatal race, said last night: "It was the worst experience I have ever had".

As the death toll mounted — with 22 yachts sunk or abandoned and 10 still unaccounted for, a badly-bruised Mr. Heath said: "We were fighting massive seas".

Swinging from a can of beer after sailing safely into port at Plymouth, the former Tory leader, looking tired, with a thick stubble on his chin, added: "It was very frightening — the sort of thing you would never want to experience again".

Mr. Heath and his 11-man crew all reached Plymouth safe and well although Morning Cloud was knocked over by the storm early on Tuesday morning, about two hours after rounding Fastnet Rock.

Mr. Heath said he was flung across the cabin where he was navigating at the time.

He said that, since the storm blew up on Monday night, he had managed to snatch only a few hours sleep — as his boat passed the Scilly Isles yesterday morning.

He denied that the 45-foot vessel had suffered a damaged rudder or mast. He also denied sending out a Mayday message.

The crew of the Portsmouth registered yacht Valross, one of 16 yachts in the Admiral's Cup race to put into Dunmore East, Co. Waterford last night, told of how they were almost gassed during the height of Tuesday's storm.

Tim Bevan, the skipper-owner of the six-year-old yacht, who comes from London, said: "I have been ocean sailing all my life and the seas off the south east coast were absolutely new to me. The winds blew at over 80 miles per hour for a time and over 90 miles an hour for over an hour. They were the biggest seas I have ever seen."

"On one occasion I was flung out of my bunk and smashed against one of the cabin windows, breaking it. The water poured in the window and through the cockpit and our main pump failed. We managed to keep her afloat with the use of an emergency hand pump".

He added: "Then another big sea ripped our cooker from its base and tore out the

gas pipe, pouring gas into the cabin. We managed to patch this up and also managed to patch up the window, but every time a big sea hit us it broke through the temporary repairs. It was plain hell for 10 hours. We had no hot food and, on five different occasions, crew members were washed overboard but were held by their lifelines".

Skipper Bevan said that his Swedish built yacht had competed in the Fastnet Race on two other occasions, but he never saw anything like the seas last Tuesday off the Irish Coast. His yacht was very well placed in the race when they ran into the storm.

Another yacht, which put into Dunmore East yesterday, was the Dublin registered Raparee with its six crew members, one from Cork City.

They are Kevin Burke, a bank official in Dublin, but a native of Douglas Road, Cork, Brian Kelly, Enda O Coineen, John Marrow, Stephen O'Flaherty and M. O'Donnell.

Kevin Burke told the Examiner last night: "I went on the trip because I had been crewing with Brian Kelly for the last two years. The race was hair-raising. Our yacht was pushed over twice by high seas and on the second occasion our mast was in the water and we shipped a lot of water to the cockpit. When we baled her out," he said, "we contacted an R.A.F. helicopter which was picking up survivors out of the sea nearby and got our position from them and headed for Dunmore East".

Enda O'Coineen said that a massive wave had washed him and his crew out of the cockpit when they were 100 miles off the Fastnet. Fortunately their lifelines held and he and his crew were able to scramble back on board.

Mr. O'Coineen who is from the Aran Islands, said that when it became a battle for survival, they decided to play it safe and forget the race.

At one stage a yacht beside them was abandoned by its crew who were picked up by a helicopter.

The list of 14 yachts in Dunmore East last night was as follows: Silicone, Lipstick, Valross, Autonomy, Juggernaut, Locomotion, Korsar, Alpha II, Tam O Shanter, Silver Foam, Bardozic III, Veronier, Raparee, Phynnoderee.

Known dead

Among the 17 known dead is Mr. G. Winks, who lived in Byfleet, Surrey, but who came from Kibarrack, Co. Dublin. Others identified are:

Gremalkin: Mr. D. Sheahan, the skipper, of Camberley, Surrey.
Trophy: Mr. Robin Bowyer, of Cricklewood, London; Mr. Paul Everson, of Billericay, Essex, and Mr. John Puxley, of Burnham-on-Crouch, Essex.
Ariadne: Mr. W. C. L. Le Fevre, of

Harrogate; Mr. R. L. Robie, of London, W.1.; Mr. D. Crisp, an Englishman living in Innskreis, Austria, and the skipper, Mr. F. H. Ferris, an American living in London.

Festina Tertia: Mr. R. Watts, of Fulmer, Buckinghamshire.

Flashlight: Mr. R. Brown and Mr. C. Stevenson, both from the Royal Naval Engineering College, Plymouth.



A typical scene at Crosshaven yesterday as a crew member of one of the damaged yachts sorts out the belongings to dry on deck. ('Examiner')

The unfolding tragedy

WHILE the storm-battered Fastnet crews dried out yesterday after their ordeal, more stories of heroism and tragedy were emerging.

Comedian Eric Morecambe's brother-in-law, publican Alan Bartlett, told how he survived in mountainous seas while three of his friends died.

Mr. Bartlett (53), who runs the Torrington Arms, North Finchley, London, and seven other men on board his yacht Trophy launched their liferaft after the yacht's rudder snapped.

The liferaft, then the yacht, turned over, and split in two. In seas worse than any in their experience, the eight men clung on.

Mr. Bartlett said: "The waves got worse, the wind was howling, and two of the crew could not hold on any longer. They drifted away. There was no way we could get the rafts to them, and they couldn't swim to us."

Mr. Bartlett was saved by Simon Flemming (26) and Derrick Morland, who held him up in the water.

But crewmate Robin Bowyer could not hang on, and drowned.

Mr. Bartlett, speaking after being reunited with his

wife yesterday, said: "When we were clinging on we didn't have any sense of anything. It didn't register in our minds what had happened to the others. We just had to hang on."

"After we came ashore and realised we had lost three crewmen, it became an absolute tragedy."

Roger Watts, a computer consultant whose son was born just four weeks ago, was swept overboard, from the yacht Festina Tertia, and drowned.

Two of the dead men from the yacht Trophy, Peter Everson of Billericay, Essex, and John Puxley of Burnham-on-Crouch, both in Essex, belonged to the Crouch Yacht Club. The club has cancelled its weekend sailing event as a mark of respect to the two men.

The inquests opened at Truro, Cornwall, yesterday into the deaths of two men involved in the race.

A pathologist said the cause of death of Frank Halliday Ferris (61), a company director of South-West London, was a mixture of exposure and drowning.

The pathologist, Dr. Trevor Betteridge, said cause of death in a second case was drowning. This victim, as yet unidentified, was code-named "Fastnet number two."

There was also one complaint: Mr. Sydney Bidwell, Labour MP for Southall, has asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much the navy rescue operation cost the taxpayer. He wants Sir Geoffrey Howe to invite the yachting organisations and

sponsors to contribute towards the cost.

Mr. Bidwell commented: "It was, of course, totally right that rescue services should have been brought into operation to save people in this dreadful storm."

"But it must also be recognised that those involved are normally well-heeled, well-to-do people indulging in a fairly expensive sport for their own pleasure."

He added: "Yet the cost of rescuing them — and it must add up to a pretty hefty bill — will have to be borne by many taxpayers in poorer parts of the country who cannot afford a car, never mind a yacht."

"It is crystal clear that those who sponsored this event should at least partly meet the bill incurred."

But the pressure is still on at Culdrose — if not with people, with telephones. They never stop ringing with calls from America, New Zealand, and Singapore, wanting to know about survivors.

A Dutch TV team arrived and wanted to go on a rescue mission.

With endless patience, the PRO at Culdrose, Chief Petty Officer Peter Ferris, said: "OK, you must take your turn. There are a lot of people waiting to go up."

When they do go, they will see the carnage, the empty yachts drifting helplessly. They will see the difficulties the men of Culdrose have had to face, endlessly peering into the sea for someone who might still be alive. They are more interested in people than in boats.

Achill drama

Tragedy was averted at the Achill Island, Co. Mayo Championship yawl race yesterday — thanks to the quick thinking of a local fisherman.

A yawl on its way to the starting point capsized and a family of four is reported to have been tossed into the sea.

Within minutes, a local fisherman, who is also a diver, jumped into the water to rescue Mr. Martin McGinty who was in difficulties.

The accident occurred at about 3 o'clock yesterday as boats gathered at the starting line of the race.

A Garda spokesman said

Mr. McGinty was "fine" and had not sustained any injuries. However, he was attended by a local doctor shortly afterwards.

LIFEBOATS PROVE WORTH

In the past few days, Ireland's lifeboat service has been very active saving life at sea, and in the last year crews of the 22 stations around the coast launched on more than 122 occasions, saving over 54 lives.

The Valentia station has been particularly active in a service established back in 1824. The running cost of the whole R.N.L.I. is about £10 million, with the Irish fleet approaching £1 million per annum. Apart from the modest State grant of only £20,000, all funds are raised voluntarily.

At a number of stations it has been an unbroken tradition for the local fishermen to make up the whole crew, but crews also contain men in other occupations and they are all volunteers prepared to run innumerable risks, discomfort and inconvenience.

Jay was not in rescue incident

Mr. Peter Jay, Britain's former ambassador to the U.S., yesterday denied a news agency report that he and his yacht had been involved in a rescue incident off the Cork coast and that he had been helped into Baltimore on Tuesday.

Mr. Jay said that at the time he was in Crookhaven and not at sea. He also pointed out that his yacht was monohulled and not a catamaran as the report stated.



Winchman winches up the slumped corpse of a crewman from Hestruel