

Helicopter plucks 3 from yacht

2/7/1993 By GUY OLIVER **CAPE TIMES**

AN Air Force helicopter plucked three crew members from the deck of the sinking yacht Fortis yesterday in a tense maritime rescue just before the vessel slipped beneath the ocean's surface.

The owner of the Port Elizabeth-based yacht Mr Owen Thomas, skipper Mr Cal Tomlinson and crew member Mr Sean Whitting were sailing the Cape-to-Rio entrant to her home port when the yacht began taking water about 20 nautical miles south-west of Cape Agulhas about 11am.

Speaking to the Cape Times at Ysterplaat Air Force base, Mr Thomas said he believed the yacht's hull was punctured by a submerged object, but had "no idea when it happened".

"I just don't know where the water was coming in, but it was coming in fast," he said.

At 1.25pm a mayday call was sent out and an Air Force Dakota and Puma helicopter were scrambled.

Meanwhile, the crew prepared to scuttle the Fortis, cutting the rigging away and launching the life raft and dingy stocked with supplies and a radio.

About 2.45pm two divers jumped from the hovering helicopter and boarded Fortis, and the three crew were hoisted to safety.

Mr Thomas said the loss of his yacht, which had taken seven years to build, was "too terrible".



LAST MOMENTS ABOARD . . . Crew and metro divers cut rigging aboard the yacht Fortis just before she sank. The crew was winched on to the Air Force Puma helicopter after the vessel struck a submerged object about 20 miles south-west of Cape Agulhas.

Picture: CHARL PAUW

INSET: Owner Mr Owen Thomas, 68, skipper Mr Cal Tomlinson, 27, and crew member Mr Sean Whitting, 27.

Picture: BENNY GOOL

