

“THANK GOD ... IT’S A MIRACLE’

**The thud of a fist and Briton
is saved from cruel seas.**

Report by Ian Burrell

The Rescue

It was the thud of a fist on the hull of Tony Bullimore’s overturned yacht that told him he was not going to die.

The British yachtsman had spent four days and four nights in an air-pocket inside his capsized yacht, praying that he would be saved. ‘I started shouting, “I’m coming, I’m coming”,’ he said. ‘It took a few seconds to get from one end of the boat to the other. Then I took a few deep breaths and I dived out.’

It was the culmination of one of the most dramatic sea rescues of all time. Mr Bullimore had been stranded more than 2,400 km from the Australian coast and 1,500km from Antarctica. The key to Tony Bullimore’s incredible feat of endurance was an ability to remain calm and methodical in his thinking despite the most appalling circumstances.

The Ordeal

Trapped in darkness, with freezing waters lapping at his feet and buffeted by 20m waves, he will have known only too well that he was more than 1,600km from the nearest land.

Faced with the danger of being dragged down with the boat, most people would have been tempted to try and jump clear.

Mr Bullimore’s sense of calm, developed from years of solo yachting, taught him otherwise. He stayed with the yacht and quickly took stock of the few straws available for him to cling on to.



Yesterday he described the horrific conditions that he had endured.

‘Two-thirds of the hull filled with water. There was a hole in the bottom of the hull, in fact really at the top, where one of the windows had come out. This caused water to be sucked in and out at a colossal rate, causing a kind of Niagara Falls, but upside down.

‘I had to find myself a spot as high up as possible and put nets around it so that I could crawl in there and lash myself in to get out of the water and to get away from everything.’

Dr Howard Oakley, of the Institute of Naval Medicine, said keeping a clear head and a sense of order were vital. Once he had decided to stay with the yacht, Mr Bullimore’s priorities were to activate the distress beacon transmitter and to ensure he was getting enough air. Perched in a makeshift hammock, Mr Bullimore was alone with his thoughts, with nothing visible to focus on. This is the kind of situation that makes people motion sick.

Yet the discomfort of sea-sickness could not break Mr Bullimore’s remarkable spirit.

'This chap is not an ordinary person, like you or me,' said a clinical psychologist, Eileen Kennedy.

'The kind of person who takes part in a solo yacht race welcomes challenge and risk.'

The Survivor

The yachtsman said that during the 'horrific, traumatic experience' he was 'hanging on in there and believing something would happen and just fighting.'

Through four days of darkness and solitude, he depended on 'sheer determination, a little water, a little chocolate' to sustain him.

'It was just determination, a little water, a little chocolate ... hanging on in there.'

But even Mr Bullimore was at his endurance limit.

'I only just made it. Because of weather conditions, I was deteriorating at a reasonable rate,' he said. 'When I knew that the rescue was actually going to happen, I felt ecstatic.'

Exercises

1. Give two facts about the ordeal undergone by Tony Bullimore.
2. Using your own words, explain what the text means by:
 - a. 'the culmination of one of the most dramatic sea rescues of all time'.
 - b. 'incredible feat of endurance'.
 - c. 'quickly took stock of the few straws available for him to cling on to'.
3. State three things Tony Bullimore did to keep himself alive.
4. Re-read the section with the sub-heading 'The survivor'. Identify two phrases that indicate Tony Bullimore's state of mind at the end of his ordeal.
5. Using your own words, explain how the article shows that Tony Bullimore was 'not an ordinary person like you or me'.