

Confidential

Incident Debrief Report

1998 Sydney to Hobart Yacht Race

Rescue of "ABN AMRO Challenge" - 26/27 Dec 98

Author

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**Divisional Commander of the Batemans Bay Division and Senior
Regional Officer (Far South) of the Royal Volunteer Coastal Patrol**

Situation

On the night of Saturday 26 Dec 98, several members of the Batemans Bay Division of the were in attendance at the base station, monitoring the radio schedules of the 1998 Telstra Sydney to Hobart yacht race on HF 4483.

- 2130 hrs -** 'ABN AMRO Challenge' crew reported to Telstra Race Control that they had lost their rudder, had no steering and that the vessel was taking water.
- 2150 hrs -** 'ABN AMRO Challenge' reported to Telstra Race Control that the intake of water was under control, but that they were having difficulty steering the vessel and would attempt to make the nearest port - Batemans Bay - approximately twenty five kilometres distant.
- 2245 hrs -** 'ABN AMRO Challenge' reported being unable to steer or make way to Batemans Bay. They were concerned about sea conditions and the expected approach of a southerly front. They requested tow assistance.
- 2300 hrs -** A land line call was received from Shoalhaven Marine Rescue advising us that Telstra Race Control was trying to contact us on VHF channel 16. We were unable to hear them on VHF 16, but were able to make contact with them on HF 4483. Telstra Race Control asked if Batemans Bay Coastal Patrol could assist, as Police Launch Nemesis was out of range to the north. Batemans Bay advised that we could attempt the rescue of 'ABN AMRO Challenge' and the 12 persons on board, using our off-shore rescue vessel 'Community Spirit', an accredited 32 foot, twin diesel powered Randell.

Weather

A "Priority Gale Warning" had been issued for this area at 1414 hours on Saturday 26 December 1998. (See official documents)

Action taken

Batemans Bay Coastal Patrol vessel 'Community Spirit' with a crew of five was detailed to assist the 46 foot yacht 'ABN AMRO Challenge'. Given the possible need to evacuate the twelve persons on board the yacht the crew of Community Spirit was carefully selected with an eye to maximum experience and proficiency.

- 2325 hrs -** Telstra Race Control confirmed the need for assistance and authorised the operation.
- 2330 hrs -** Batemans Bay Coastal Patrol contacted 'ABN AMRO Challenge' on HF 4483 to fully ascertain the situation and to advise that we were rendering assistance. The yacht was advised of an estimated time of arrival at the scene of between two and a half to three hours.
- 2335 hrs: -** Community Spirit departed the marina with 5 persons on board.
- 2336 hrs: -** Batemans Bay Police were advised of the situation (Senior Constable Melinda Fields).
- 0128 hrs: -** Using GPS and Radar, Community Spirit located 'ABN AMRO Challenge', two hours and 3 minutes from the time of confirmation of the operation. The situation was assessed and preparations made to provide assistance in the form of a tow.
- 0145 hrs:** With 'ABN AMRO Challenge' in tow Community Spirit proceeded to Batemans Bay. The length of the tow was 100 metres and conditions were bad, with N-NE winds up to 35 Km/h and seas up to four metres on a swell of three to four metres. Batemans Bay Police were advised that the tow was in progress.
- 0610 hrs:** Both vessels arrived safely in Batemans Bay. Due to its three metre draft the yacht was unable to cross the bar at the entrance of the Clyde River, and accordingly was secured in the lee of Snapper Island. Most of the yacht crew were transferred to the rescue vessel and taken to the Batemans Bay Coastal Patrol Base, where they were given coffee and participated in a debrief. (See full details of official log records).

Considerations

Crew selection was made on the Divisional Commander's authority and was based upon qualifications, experience and proficiency.

Caution was taken into account particularly in the light of a gale warning issued at 1414 hrs for the area which indicated that winds of more than 35 knots from the N-NE with a W-SW change of up to 40 knots, with seas up to 4 metres and a swell of 3 - 4 metres could be expected.

The capabilities of the rescue vessel Community Spirit were considered and it was laid down that radio contact was to be made by the vessel every 30 minutes. Priority consideration was given to the safety of the five crew members

Consideration was also given to the procedures to be adopted if evacuation of the crew of the yacht was found necessary and to problems of towing a 46 foot yacht in heavy seas.

Personnel

The following members of the Batemans Bay Division of the Royal Volunteer Coastal Patrol were involved in the operation:

Crew

<u>Name</u>	<u>Age</u>	<u>No</u>	<u>Member</u>	<u>Skipper</u>	<u>Navigation</u>	<u>First Aid</u>
Gordon Patterson	58	1242	15 years	Offshore	Offshore TL5	Advanced
Peter Paine	53	3905	6 years	Offshore	Offshore TL5	Qualified
George Mercieca	64	1440	12 years	Offshore	Offshore TL5	Qualified
Michael Trick	36	4608	4 years	Inshore	Coastal TL5	Qualified
Peter Rosenkranz	38	4602	4 years	Inshore	Off-shore TL5	Instructor

Radio Base

<u>Position</u>	<u>Name</u>	<u>Age</u>	<u>No</u>	<u>Member</u>	<u>Skipper</u>	<u>Navigation</u>	<u>1st Aid</u>
Operations Officer	Dirk Van Luin	59	3436	6 years	Inshore	Inshore	Instructor
Radio Operator	Dennis Burkinshaw	45	3438	6 years	Inshore	Coastal	Instructor
Stand-by Station/Relay	Elaine Patterson	55	1439	12 years		Inshore	Qualified

I have previously alluded to the selection criteria employed for crew members in this instance. I would however like to point out that there was no shortage of volunteers and no member of this division should feel that there is any adverse reflection on them in not being selected. Indeed I can sympathise with the Australian cricket selectors, as I now know how hard it can be to be unable to include dedicated and talented people. I wish to record my thanks to those members who though willing and capable, had to be left out because of space considerations.

Costs

The conservatively estimated cost to the Batemans Bay Division of the RVCP is \$2,685. This has been calculated as follows:-

85 man hours @ \$25 per hour	=	\$2,125
8 hours steaming @ \$45 per hour	=	\$360
Miscellaneous (reports etc.)	=	\$200
Total	=	\$2,685

Persons rescued - 12

Approximate value of vessel saved - \$1M

Summary

Commendations

I would firstly like to record my thanks to the volunteer crew of the Batemans Bay Coastal Patrol rescue vessel 'Community Spirit', who together with the volunteer team in the radio base, combined as a team to perform a long and difficult rescue operation.

I must also commend the master and crew of 'ABN AMRO Challenge' for their preparation of tow lines and equipment aboard the yacht in readiness to accept the tow upon our arrival. This very able team of seamen greatly aided us to be of assistance to them, with a minimum of delay in extremely difficult conditions.

Concerns

Some trepidation was felt about Community Spirit being a 32 foot fibreglass boat. The vessel was operating at what must be considered the limit of safety for such a vessel. In fact conditions were not unlike those that brought many fibreglass boats unstuck. Perhaps steel or aluminium hulled vessels would be more appropriate for this type of work.

Also of concern is the downgrading of off-shore accreditation for units such as the Batemans Bay Division. Our previous accreditation was for 30 nautical miles off-shore and this has now been downgraded to 15 nautical miles. Why? In this instance we were required to venture 25 nautical miles from shore. Whilst this was authorised by the police, one must be concerned as to the legal and other ramifications, if something had gone amiss outside the 15 nautical mile zone. From the point of view of this division some answers to this question are necessary.

It has been noted that several crew members were washed overboard from yachts competing in the Sydney to Hobart race, some with tragic results. With this in mind we have purchased five personal EPIRBs and strobe lights to wear with life jackets during night operations.

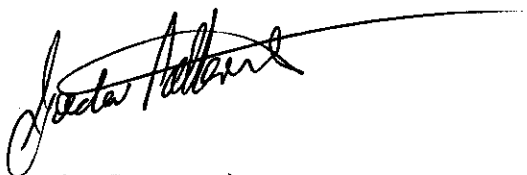
Recommendations

It is recommended that consideration be given by the appropriate authorities to the funding of purpose built, preferably steel or aluminium hulled, rescue vessels.

The entire cost of this (and every other) operation mounted by this division has been borne by the division from funds raised from the local community. It is strongly recommended that more funding be made available from other sources, be they from government bodies such as Waterways, insurance company contributions, or some form of 'user pays' system.

Conclusion

Many factors combined to make this operation successful, among them equipment condition, preventative maintenance, training skills, a positive approach, sensible decisions, crew considerations and a knowledge of vessel capabilities and limitations. Above all though was the sheer dedication of the men and women of the Batemans Bay Division of the Royal Volunteer Coastal Patrol on behalf of whom I am proud to present this report.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Gordon Patterson', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

(Gordon Patterson)
Divisional Commander Batemans Bay
Senior Regional Officer (Far South)

Jan 99