

Sydney - Hobart 1998

"Business Post Naiad"

Skipper: Bruce Guy

Additional document by Steve Walker - crewman & 2nd watch leader

This document is not meant to blame people for what happened. At the end of the day we were caught in the middle of a violent storm (80 - 90 knots) that literally overwhelmed "Naiad" and perhaps nothing short of not being there may have changed our situation. The following ideas are "ifs" and "buts" and we may never know with certainty whether they would have helped us or not.

Naiad's Experience.

"Naiad" was caught in one of the worst areas of the storm and we were rolled 360 degrees when caught in the break of a huge wave whilst heading approx. 180 magnetic under bare poles at 5.30 pm on 27/12/98 positioned 38 degrees 05' south and 150 degrees 32' east. Wind was approx. 85 knots, waves up to approx. 20 metres high and conditions could only really be described as horrendous and certainly dangerous for a 40' yacht.

We were dismasted and suffered structural hull damage including broken windows and felt that we were in imminent danger and sent out a mayday via HF radio. After recovering the mast and securing its remains on deck we commenced to motor towards Gabo Island to get into the lee of land and then hopefully proceed to Eden.

After the loss of the mast, Naiad's motion in the water was much quicker and she felt that she could easily roll again if hit by a bad wave. At 11.00 pm on the 27/12/98 she was hit by a breaking wave that had us instantly "flipped" 180 degrees upside down where she stayed for 4 to 5 minutes before being hit by another wave that continued the roll another 180 degrees to complete this our second 360 degree roll. During the period of being upside down she took on large volumes of water mainly through the windows that were broken during the first 360 roll and this would have enhanced her stability upside down. There were 7 of us trapped inside the hull and we were standing in approx. 1 metre of water when standing on the inverted cabin top. It was during this period that Phil Skeggs who was in the cockpit, drowned, Rob Matthews who had been helming was very fortunate to finally unclip his harness line and narrowly escape drowning and our skipper Bruce Guy who was below decks suffered a major heart attack and died just as Naiad had finally righted herself. At this point Naiad was nearly swamped with 1 metre of water surging about below decks and only the insertion of the storm boards stopped green water flowing below decks via the cockpit. Whilst Shayne Hansen and Matthew Sherriff tried to revive Phil Skeggs in the cockpit, other crew launched flares as a loom of light was seen to our east, one of our six man life rafts was inflated and launched and our second raft was readied for immediate inflation should Naiad have sunk. The storm jib and 1.5 oz. spinnaker were attached via spinnaker braces to the bow and deployed into the sea in an attempt to hold the bow up to the seas as we felt that if she was surfed bow first down the huge

seas the water below decks would surge forward and cause her to nose dive herself literally to the bottom, taking everything and everybody with her. Meanwhile Steve Walker stayed below with Bruce Guy holding his head above water in the small hope that he may have been in a deep coma. After approx. 30 minutes it was obvious that Bruce and Phil were both dead and that nothing could be done for them so Bruce was secured in a quarter berth and Phil in the cockpit. Meanwhile Naiad had not taken on any more water via hull damage so we commenced to bale her out with a 25 litre bucket. By 2.00 am on the 28/12/98 we had the water level down to 1/2 a metre deep below decks and decided to leave that amount there as she felt less likely to flip again with the water in her. We attempted to bring the uninflated second life raft back below deck to reduce the risk of it being washed overboard but in the process the inflation cord got caught causing it to commence inflating whilst below so we quickly got it back on deck and secured it over the side next to the other raft. At this point we all went below battening down all the hatches bar a small gap for the epiRB aerial which had been activated after the first roll. At 3.00 am Naiad was swept by another huge wave and after that the liferafts disappeared from view. At dawn (5.00 am) we found their painters and bow fittings still attached to the yacht. Conditions felt as though they had been abating from approx. 1.00 am till at dawn the wind was approx 50-60 knots and seas down to 6-10 metres. Although Naiad was a mess we felt as though we were through the worst of it and would survive providing we did not get a repeat of the 27 th. Not being able to find the distress "V" sheet we rigged a red sail turtle bag over the main and boom to help aircraft to spot us. At 7.30 am on the 28/12/99 we heard a light aircraft and fired a flare and an orange smoke flare that the aircraft saw. It appeared as if they were homing in on our EPIRB as well. They circled us at low level and at 8.00 am the NRMA Care helicopter arrived on the scene. After assessing the situation they indicated by hand signals they wanted to lift us off by jumping into the sea and then their frogman being lowered, to the person in the water, fitting him to a lift harness and then together being lifted into the helicopter. This they did 7 times and as we left, we secured the yacht's hatches, the 2 deceased, fitted another EPIRB the helicopter gave to us, were flown to Merimbula airport, then ambulated to Pambula Hospital where we were checked over, showered and fed whilst Peter Keats and Jim Rogers were kept for observation till later that day. During the rest of the day we were required to give statements individually to 2 NSW CIB officers at Eden Police station. We then flew via private charter back to Tasmania on the afternoon of the 29/12/98. All through the whole experience the crew in total did not panic and worked hard to the man to survive the ordeal and look after each other. We set out as a team and worked as one right throughout the experience - without that commitment to the team, we may well have not survived. The crew were terrific.

The rescue services that handled us did a terrific job and we cannot thank them enough - they acted as the well trained, true professionals they are.

Question 100

Storm Forces

Since the storm most of us have done a lot of thinking and reading about storms in an effort to find out if we had of done anything different would it have made any difference. We had certainly had Naiad sailing in 60 to 65 knots previously and at that level we felt that we were in control and could handle that both as a yacht and a crew. However during the race conditions worsend rapidly and in a very short period of time we had gone from 65 to 75 knots. The yacht was in control at that. However as the wind got to 80 knots plus Naiad was overpowered by the storm jib. She was laying over at 40 degrees and was getting harder to steer and starting to travel "out of control" at times although it was good to have the positive steerage that went with the speed. The other worry for us was if conditions got worse that night then it would have been close to suicidal to put someone on the fore deck to remove it. It was with a great deal of reluctance that we removed it to go bare poled as knew we would be at the mercy of the seas. Bare poled, we were doing 2 to 4 knots at 80 degrees to sea and wind and she was laying over about 20 degrees under the force of the wind. The waves were big & strong and when breaking they hit hard. Since the experience we have found out that the wind forces on the rig nearly double as the wind speed goes from 65 to 85 knots. Also the theoretical kinetic energy that a wave can attain is proportional to the fourth power of the wind speed which equates to nearly 20 times the power in a wave from 65 knots to a wave at 85 knots. These figures are staggering and relate to the situation Naiad was in.

Weather and forecasts

Both the Weather Bureau and Telstra control were issuing forecasts of 45 to 55 knots. We did not have a problem with that and at no stage did we get forecasts for more. It was not till "Sword of Orion" radioed in that we knew we were in for far worse (they radioed that they were in 75 knots) and at that point it was too late to run for shelter for us. If we could have I am sure we would have as we were certainly concerned about the weather - you don't look forward to a night at sea in 55 knots let alone what we were to cop.

In hindsight we put too much faith in Telstra control's forecast and we should have radioed Melbourne Radio and got the land station reports for all of Bass Strait as far back as Cape Border. These were certainly showing signs of wind greater than 55 knots much earlier which may have helped us make a decision to go for shelter much earlier and at a time when we could have. However the low did not deepen and go cyclic till after approx. 2.30 pm on the 27 th and it did it very close to where we were so just about no forecast could have predicted with great accuracy just what we were going to get exactly where and when but I do wonder if it was known but not forecast that the wind was going to be more than 55 knots?

I think in future Telstra control should as a matter of course include all the land station reports from Newcastle to Cape Border to Matsuyker Island every time they are updated for the duration of the race. This would save 120 yachts trying to get that information from Melbourne Radio. I am sure had we have had this information it may have helped us make some better decisions about running

for cover at a more appropriate time. Also it would help to have forecasts as they are updated and not just twice a day at sked times.

Radio Communications

Obviously Telstra control was overwhelmed by the situation that developed. In hindsight the CYCA knew a Bass Strait storm was brewing as did all competitors, but there was not much competitors could do apart from go to shelter - but from what? - 55 knots of wind? However the CYCA race committee must have known the likelihood of needing extra communications even in 55 knots and could have organised extra communication equipment and personnel for Telstra control to be taken on board in Eden to help deal with the storm. It was very disappointing for us in a crippled state on the evening and night of the 27th, and having to rely on radio relays to be basically blasted out of radio contact by a lot of poor and wasted communications going on between "Team Jaguar" and Telstra control at a time that many other yachts including ourselves were in serious trouble. Why didn't they change to a different frequency? It is even more disappointing when the skipper of Team Jaguar has publicly stated since that he was not in imminent danger at any stage? In any event conditions were so bad on the night of the 27th that I really believe there was no way of helping us at that stage - but it would have been comforting to have at least let Telstra control know exactly what was happening to us on say a half hourly basis - we had after all issued a mayday which had not been downgraded by us - we were still in imminent danger in our opinion and events proved that to be a correct assessment of our situation.

Sailing Instruction Item 7.4

It was very distressing to me personally having that read out over the radio without any back up information whatsoever as to why we should retire or go to shelter. The forecast was still for 45-55 knots - nothing had changed since 2.30 pm the previous day - why wasn't it read out then? or did they know something we did not know and that they were not going to tell us? The way it was read out with no back up information at all, really annoyed and confused me personally. In any event it was too late for us to have changed our date with destiny.

It would have been much better to have passed on all that they knew as well - or maybe that was nothing? It would also have been much better to read out the clause that allows yachts to motor to safety during the race and not have to retire from the race and then continue racing after the storm as Lou Abrahams from Melbourne did as reported in one of the sailing magazines since. - That may have helped us if we had of known that to be allowed under race rules. Which rule should I have read? In any event I don't think we could have motored to windward in 80 knots with all the windage in the rig but it may have helped to keep her head into the seas. We were loathe to start motoring prior to the first roll thinking that to mean automatic retirement from the race. We were still hoping conditions would quickly abate (that is drop back to 55 knots) and allow us to continue to sail on.

The Media

With 2 deaths on board and being plucked from the water in a very fatigued state, is to say the least, very distressing. What is even more distressing is for the media to be broadcasting the 2 deaths over the airways to the public including our families before we had even set foot on land let alone been given the opportunity to ring and notify our loved ones first. This is to put it bluntly disgraceful behaviour. It is even worse when you know that the only way they could have obtained that information was to listen to rescue services communications with scanners. It gets even worse because only 5 to 10 minutes after I had rung one of the widows to let her know, the press were on her door step seeking a statement from an obviously very grief stricken family. It was almost too much of a coincidence for them not to have been scanning in on the analogue phone that I borrowed to let them know our situation as soon as we were able to on reaching dry land. I am aware that it is a police matter to officially notify families in circumstances such as ours but this is nearly always many, many hours after the media have reported it. It would be far easier for grieving families to receive such bad news prior to it going to the media or worse finding out from the media first themselves. The media have proved themselves incapable of decent human dignity in these circumstances and it would appear as if some form of government legislation is needed to bring them into line with decent human behaviour. We are only too aware the media have a job to do and we were willing to and did give a press conference once the families knew all the details and were ready for it to go public.

Question 101

Basically Naiad was a well found seaworthy yacht that handled well up to about 80 knots of wind. The owner/skipper Bruce Guy and crew made sure her equipment was of a high standard to cat. 1 safety and would in fact work. The Tasmanian safety officer who checked this equipment is a capable and honest person. By the same token we had adequate cat. 1 gear we did not have a lot of spare and extra gear. All the crew had excellent clothing and wet weather gear thankfully with some having their own safety harness and floatation devices and strobes. We ran into trouble when at about 80 to 85 knots we were overpowered by our storm jib and removed it to proceed under bare poles. This was always going to be risky as we did not have the steerage way needed to avoid or put the bow into bad waves. We tried running with the waves and wind but after several bad broaches with no control at all we gave that option away as too dangerous. If we had of had other options on board they may of helped and these options could have been:

- 1 - Smaller storm (hurricane) jib to continue sailing with - say 60% of cat. 1 size.
- 2 - Large diameter parachute sea anchor to lay on & hold the bow to the seas.
- 3 - Some drogue system to trail astern and give us directional stability. I would

seriously question this as I'm not sure Naiad would have survived 4 to 5 metres of accelerated water smashing into her cockpit and companionway storm boards with 80 to 85 knots of wind driving the waves with great force.

4 - Approx 200 metres of nylon anchor rope to facilitate 2 or 3 as above.

5 - Type 406 EPIRB for the yacht as this would help rescue organisers enormously by identifying the yacht in trouble.

6 - It would help if liferafts were fitted with their own EPIRBS - this would give rescuers a much better chance of finding crews in liferafts.

7 - It may be better to call liferafts "Last resorts" because in those conditions that is what they are and I seriously doubt we would have survived if we had taken to ours - as with the Fastnet race of 1979 I feel a floating yacht stands a far better chance of survival than a liferaft as such.

8 - Liferaft painter attachment points - should they be stronger? - a catch 22 situation - if they are too strong and they are tied to a sinking yacht it would pull the liferaft under as well and I certainly was carrying my "Swiss Army pocket knife" to cut the painter with if required.

9 - I would have put all 7 survivors in one of our 6 man rafts with our only EPIRB if it came to that - at the time I felt that would have been our best chance of a group survival.

10 - We were very fortunate that 2 of us had our waterproof bush walking miner type head torches at hand when we rolled particularly in the 2nd roll at night as when we were upside down we had good light below decks. These were the only lights we had for the rest of the night and to say they were a Godsend is an understatement.

11 - Flares need to be very basically and clearly marked so one can tell instantly what colour they are and whether or not they are parachute types or not. e.g. they must only be the colour they are with maybe a printed parachute around the centre of them if they are that variety. They should all be fired the same way so as to avoid confusion and the firing mechanism should be able to be fired with greasy slippery hands as this was our experience - how do you dry and clean your hands in emergency situations?

12 - Safety harness clips need to be designed without the nitch at the end of the hook, so it does not catch on anything when trying to be disconnected under load. We nearly lost another crew member because of this nitch.

13 - Lockers and cupboards below need secure latches which prevent them opening during a 360 degree roll. Stoves need fixing so they cannot leave their mounts in such a roll. Flooring needs fixing to survive 360 deg. rolls.

14 - I feel the best alternative for a 40' yacht in 80 knots plus of wind is not to be there at all as this would be the only certain way of surviving it.