Rescued yachtsman tells of his five-day ordeal at sea

OUR GREAT SURVIVOR

MISSING round-the-world yachtsman Tony Bullimore, who was plucked from the freezing southern seas this morning, has admitted: "It was a horrific, traumatic experience."

Former Southend schoolboy Mr Bullimore, 57, escaped his incredible ordeal with slight hypothermia, dehydration and a touch of frostbite.

His yacht capsized more than 1,500 miles off the coast off Australia on Sunday, leaving him trapped for nearly five days inside an air pocket in the wrecked hull.

An Australian frigate, Adelaide, sent to the scene to rescue Mr Bullimore arrived late last night. When he met with crew the rescued sailor asked them: "Can I have a cup of tea?"

Speaking from the Adelaide Mr Bullimore, son of Southend market trader, Bill, said: "It was just sheer determination, a lot of water and a lot of chocolate."

"It was pretty horrible. I was praying and hoping there was something happening above water."

Describing the moment when he heard tapping on the outside of the hull, he said: "It was absolutely astonishing, I felt like I had been brought back to life."

The brave sailor responded by swimming out to greet his rescuers.

Mr Bullimore's sister, Diana Hutt, 59, of Blenheim Gardens, Leigh, has been sitting by the phone praying for his safe return.

"I was praying and hoping something was happening above water."

- Tony Bullimore

By LINDA CHRISTIE

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Cheers – Diana Hutt celebrates today on hearing the fantastic news that brother Tony is still alive

How miracle sailor survived the cruel sea – page 10

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The sea shall not have them

THE miraculous survival of 24-year-old Tony Bullimore on board his much-loved 6m yacht Avalon is a tribute not only to his endurance and fortitude but to the dedication and expertise of his rescuers.

Mr Bullimore survived for five days in the upturned hull of his yacht - a credit to the boat's design and build.

But without that spark of human determination which sets us apart from other animals Mr Bullimore would no longer be with us.

The whole episode throws into sharp focus the various rescue services we all take for granted.

Rescue at sea is something particularly close to the hearts of those of us in southeast Essex and the saving of Tony Bullimore brings our thoughts to our own rescuers, the dedicated RNLI and the rough sea sailors who will be kept busy this summer.

We should be thankful for all our emergency services (including the fire brigade, but that's another story) but we should also remember that we can play our part in making their lives easier.

Tony Bullimore was an experienced yachtsman on a well-built boat. But the sea still beat him.

What chance will little Johnny Smith have this summer when he's swept into the Thames Estuary aboard his rubber ring?

Yachtsmen rescued off coast of Antarctica

Two sailors whose yachts capsized during the Vendee Globe round-the-world yacht race have been rescued - one after being battered in the hull of his boat by stormy Antarctic seas for four days. Tony Bullimore of England and Thierry Dubois of France had activated emergency satellite beacons to call for help.

BRITISH round-the-world yachtsman and schoolboy Tony Bullimore survived in his upturned yacht in icy waters between Australia and Antarctica for four days sheltering in an air pocket amid the frozen British Antarctic. The 56-year-old sailor swam out from underneath his craft after crewmen aboard a Zodiac inflatable vessel from the Australian navy frigate HMAS Adelaide beached on the hull.

Dave Gray, an official with the Australian Maritime Safety Authority, said: "It's a euphoric situation. This has got to be one of the greatest all-time survival and rescue efforts ever. It's 10 times an Houdini act."

"It was the greatest: all time survival effort"

Tony Bullimore was an intrepid sailor whose adventure has taken him to the four corners of the globe. The former Fairfax secondary school pupil from Rockhampton has broken the record in the round Island Race, the Round Britain and Ireland Race and all eight legs in the 1986-87 Whitbread Round the World Race.

He has also crossed the Atlantic 37 times and sailed more than 230,000 miles.

His love of the ocean was born from rumblings along the beaches and quays of Southend.

Friends say he would often watch the day-tripper passenger boats and fishing boats ply their trade.

Australian officials said the yachtsman's ordeal came to an end when HMAS Adelaide put down its rubber-boat rescue team and knocked on the hull.

Mike Calver, a senior official at the Australian Maritime Safety Authority, said: "He heard the bangs on the hull, but at first shouted that he could not get out. They were about to cut a hole when he swam out."

Countdown to sailor's miraculous survival

MARDI: A full-scale search was triggered after Tony Bullimore, 56, made a distress call from the Southern Ocean 900 miles off Antarctica. Rescue aircraft searching for Mr Bullimore and rival French yachtsman Thierry Dubois found their capsized boats but only one survivor. The former Southend man's chances of surviving looked bleak as the region was hit by storms, huge seas and sub-zero temperatures.

TUESDAY: Hopes for Mr Bullimore's safety were boosted when rescuers noticed a change in the signal from a manually operated distress beacon believed to be aboard his yacht. Hopes faded again when Australian rescue services said it would be two days before they knew if Mr Bullimore was alive.

WEDNESDAY: Fears for Mr Bullimore increased as authorities said they believed he was floating in the freezing ocean, away from his capsized yacht. They said the sounds from the upturned hull gave new hope Tony Bullimore was alive.

Today: Mr Bullimore arrived at HMAS Adelaide which had been sent to rescue Mr Bullimore.

The two men had been competing in the Vendee Globe round-the-world race, one of the world's most dangerous sporting events, when disaster struck.

Eden's 24-year-old wife Lainey, who is celebrating in Britain with her parents and his New Zealand family members.

She said: "We opened a bottle of champagne, we're dancing around the room and we're screaming out, 'Can you imagine, it's all electric last night.' The sparks will be flying - it will be wonderful."

It is believed family members will fly to Australia to greet Mr Bullimore when he touches down on dry land later this week.

The Foreign Office praised the Australian rescue services.

A spokesman said: "We are in close contact with the Australian authorities, via the British Consul General, and are most grateful for their help in bringing about this rescue."

The sparks will be flying - it will be wonderful