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The Bow Hook

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Safe at last

Dereka Dodson is helped aboard the Charleston-based submarine tender USS Canopus by HTFN(DV) Bill K. Gassett. (Photo by PH2 Harrison)

Dodson spent five days at sea in a life raft

after the sailboat accident in which her sailing companion presumably was lost at sea.

Tender rescue ends sailor's 5-day ordeal

As the powerful engines of the Charleston-based submarine tender USS Canopus pushed the ship toward her, Dereka Dodson said that the silhouette of that "great gray ghost," backlit by the rising sun was the most wonderful, beautiful and awe inspiring thing she had ever seen.

After being taken aboard the Canopus, Dodson related a story that started out as a pleasure trip and ended in a nightmare.

The sailing craft "Demon of Hamble" had successfully completed a transatlantic yacht race and was enroute from Newport, R.I., to Fort Lauderdale, Fla.

Manned by Dodson and the vessel's owner, Angus Primrose, both from England, the sailing craft stopped at Beaufort, N.C., for sail repairs.

When the yacht left Beaufort on Oct. 22, Dodson said the wind was barely stirring, and the engine and jib had to be used to maintain steerage.

The next day, Oct. 23, the wind began to pick up and by that night, Dodson said waves were towering over their vessel. And after com-

ing off a 9 to 11 p.m. watch, she remembers telling her companion, "I hope that's the most adventurous thing I have to do."

A short time later, she said, she was awakened. "I got rolled up against the hull. 'I said to him (Primrose), 'Was that the weather or was that us?'"

"He decided to go up and have a look. As he opened the little doors to go on deck, all of a sudden we went over, and water just came pouring in."

"He said, 'We're going over,' and the next thing I knew, we were just sort of crawling around on the ceiling."

"The boat turned over and went through 180 degrees and it stayed right there. It didn't right itself," she said.

She remembers them throwing themselves desperately at the bulkheads attempting to right the yacht, and Primrose commenting that they may have to swim for it.

After the yacht did right itself, the two made their way to the bow where Dodson noticed that the stern was already awash.

Primrose launched the inflatable liferaft, but it

became entangled with the rapidly sinking yacht and inflated in an inverted position under the bow. He immediately jumped overboard and set to work freeing the lifeboat from the yacht.

Dodson remembers her friend yelling for her to jump into the water, which she did just as the yacht slipped below the waves. As they both held on to the inverted raft, Dodson noticed a mountainous wave descending on them.

She slipped an arm through one of the liferaft lifting straps and held on for dear life.

The gargantuan wave swept Primrose free from the liferaft. "He was just holding on with his hands and he got swept away," Dodson recounted. "He got swept away so far, and the wind was blowing the raft away and he just couldn't swim back."

It was hours before she could get the raft righted and even try to get into it, she said. She kept clinging to the side of the raft trying to regain enough strength to get in.

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DEREKA DODSON

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Then she said, "I thought I saw some white sharks--it might have been my imagination--and I decided I jolly well was not going to be chewed up by a shark." And with the help of a wave, she managed to get into the raft.

From late Thursday night, Oct. 23, until shortly after 8 a.m. EST, Oct. 28, it was Dereka Dodson against the elements.

She spent hours spreadeagled in the bottom of the raft, making it keep its shape as the water tried to buckle it, and worrying as water and small fish filled the space between the two bottom layers of the raft. She ate seaweed and drank rainwater, she said. Also, she said, "I had two sips of seawater in the morning and two sips at night."

The raft capsized several times, but she was able to right it "without too much trouble." She floated aimlessly in the Atlantic until Monday, Oct. 28, when she spotted the Canopus, which had been out on a routine training cruise.

On board the Canopus, the chief of the watch, DKC Wilber Haftmann, asked the JOOD, Lt.(jg) Eric Kemmerer, if the lookouts had reported an orange object in the water several thousand yards ahead. The JOOD notified the officer of the deck and the ship's commanding officer, Capt. Hugo E. Marxer, who already was on the bridge.

Capt. Marxer decided to investigate, and Canopus closed on the contact.

In the raft, it appeared to Dodson that the Canopus was sailing away from her, instead of to her, and she ducked back under the cover of the raft.

"Then I came out again and I looked and I couldn't see her at all, and I wondered if I had seen a mirage," she said.

The raft had turned in the water, and when it turned back around, she saw the Canopus again.

"I waited until I could see a bow wave, and when I saw the bow wave, I just went down and cried. It was such a relief," she said.

A lifeboat, manned by Canopus crewmen BM3 David L. Terrazas, EN3 Darryl W. Hall, SN Robert N. Harris and HW2s Joel D. Sapp and Charles St. John Brockmann, was lowered, and Dodson and her raft were brought aboard.

When Canopus returned to the Naval Weapons Station Oct. 29, the ship was met by one of the largest press contingents to assemble for a ship return in recent years.

During a press conference held on board, Dodson pro-

udly wore her Canopus tee-shirt as she commented that "I would have been happy to have been picked up by a fishing boat from China" but could hardly believe her fortune in being rescued by such a magnificent ship as Canopus.

Reports from the press conference were circulated to throughout the United States and Europe by the TV networks and news wire services. Part of the interview was featured on the NBC Today show.

After spending the night at the Naval Regional Medical Center, where she was given a clean bill of health, she departed Oct. 30 for Atlanta, where the British Consul was making arrangements for her passage back to England. She expects to resume her dentistry practice after a rest period.

As she boarded the aircraft in Charleston, now carrying toiletries, souvenirs and clothing provided by

both Canopus and the Navy Relief Society, she commented that for someone who came aboard with very little, she was leaving with a lot.

But she paid particular care to see that the raft, securely tied by a Canopus crewmember, was properly checked through as her luggage.

Woman Wins 5-Day Fight With The Sea

By FRED RIGSBEE
Special Assignments Editor

"I was absolutely determined that the sea wasn't going to have me," 36-year-old Dereka Dodson said this morning as she described her five-day ordeal alone on a life raft.

Miss Dodson, a dentist from Sussex, England, was rescued about 6 a.m. Tuesday by the Charleston-based submarine tender Canopus about 180 miles east-southeast of Charleston.

She had been drifting alone on a life raft since Thursday night when the sailing boat she was on sank during a storm. Her companion on the boat is missing and presumed drowned.

Miss Dodson was met on board the Canopus this morning by the news media when the vessel arrived at the Charleston Naval Weapons Station.

She said that she had set sail from Newport, R.I., bound for Fort Lauderdale, Fla., with the boat's owner, English yachtsman Angus Primrose, whom she described as a "very, very good friend."

Primrose, of Hampshire, England, is believed to have drowned on the night of the storm.

Primrose and Miss Dodson were going to Fort Lauderdale to sell his vessel, the Demon of Hamble.

They had sailed to Annapolis, Md., where Primrose left his daughter. From there they sailed down the coast to Beaufort, N.C., where they stopped for boat repairs. They left Wednesday and proceeded south.

The sea was very calm Thursday until afternoon, Miss Dodson said. By late in the evening the wind was up to 50 mph the seas were monstrous, she said.

She and Primrose were below in the 33-foot sailing craft when they felt the vessel make a strange move. Waves washed over the vessel and Primrose told Miss Dodson he thought the Demon was going to overturn.

It did and they found themselves crawling around on the ceiling.

Shortly afterward, the vessel righted itself and Primrose predicted it would sink shortly. They climbed onto the deck and launched a rubber raft. It became entangled

at the bow of the vessel and Primrose cut the raft free. Miss Dodson was swept away from the raft but Primrose shouted to her to swim as hard as she could to the raft. She grabbed his hand and was pulled to the raft, which was upside down.

Then a huge wave washed over them. Miss Dodson, who had crooked her arm through a strap on the raft was able to hang on but Primrose, who was holding on only with his hands, lost his grip and was washed away.

She shouted for him. There was no answer.

Climbing aboard the raft, Miss Dodson was able to save a flare and a couple of sponges.

From then until Sunday she was occupied with keeping the raft in an upright position and bailing it out. The sponges were the most useful things she had saved, Miss Dodson said.

"I refused to give up hope," she said. "I'm scared of dying."

The night before she was rescued, she spotted on the horizon a ship some distance from her. She was

hesitant to use her only flare to signal the vessel, thinking it may be too far away.

On Tuesday morning she heard the motors of a large ship, which turned out to be the Canopus. She saw the vessel from a distance and didn't know if those aboard had seen her. After what to her seemed like a long time, she realized the vessel was getting closer. "I began to cry."

During her five days adrift she wouldn't allow herself to think of negative thoughts, she said. She kept thinking of who she was going to call when she got to shore.

She stayed alive by eating seaweed that floated by and sipping sea water in the morning and at night. When it rained she caught some water in the cup of her hand and drank.

Miss Dodson was in "amazingly good physical condition" when she was rescued, said the Canopus' skipper Capt. Hugo Marxer.

Miss Dodson, who was clad in a Canopus T-shirt and pants, was poised as she recounted her experience.



DODSON



Navy Photo

Miss Dodson is assisted aboard the Canopus.

When asked if Primrose, whom she said she had known since 1972, was her boyfriend, she nodded her head yes.

She said she will make arrange-

was going sailing, Miss Dodson said.

"I think it's a fantastic miracle," she said describing her rescue.

She was scheduled to be examined at the Navy hospital today to deter-