Quartet spends chilly night in Gulf; Fitness was big factor in survival

By PHIL GARON

Thrasher Editorial Staff

A freak gust of wind made hasty work of a sailboat Friday evening and stranded three Rice students and a University employee in the Gulf waters until the next morning.

Katrina Barr, a sophomore in Brown College; Adele Lewis, the dietician of Hanszen College; Rocky McAshan and Larry Oswald, both members of Hanszen College, were passengers on the ill-fated craft, an 18-foot flat-bottomed sloop. All escaped without serious injury.

On Friday afternoon the group left the Houston Yacht Club and sailed to a nearby island to hold a picnic. The boat's rudder was bent going into the island, and this was later to hinder the maneuverability of the craft.

Capsized Boat

Later in the evening the wind shifted from west to due north and the winds began to increase in velocity. At about 9:30 pm the foursome decided to sail back to the Yacht Club; the norther had strengthened in intensity by this time. They tried tacking again the winds, but were unable to make progress.

Then the wind pulled a sudden shift and blew the sailboat over, toppling the crew into the Gulf. They immediately tried to right the boat, but the rough sea precluded any attempts to bail out the water. Each of the group except Oswald had a life preserver on; Oswald became snagged in the lines, but managed to extricate himself. The group did turn the boat over, and then hung on to the sides while floating in the water.

Some boats passed during the night, but failed to respond to the cries for aid. One barge apparently shined a searchlight on the capsized boat, but did not offer any assistance. Because of the darkness the group could not determine their proximity to shore and thus no attempt was made to swim to the shore lights in the near distance. The foursome supposed that Brown College, when Katrina failed to report back at the hour for which she had signed out, would notify the Coast Guard of her absence.

Someburger Anyone?

Katrina had noted that she would be out sailing and had signed out for 1 am. When she failed to report in, Mrs. Morrow, the house mother at Brown College, assumed that there had been a car trouble or some other viable reason for the tardiness. She notified the Campus Security patrol that the girl was still out and that they should look for her.

At 4:30 am, Antoinette Boecker, the residence chairman of Brown, was notified that the girl was still out. She talked to Trina's roommate, found out where the girl had been sailing, and called the Coast Guard to ask if any accidents had been reported. The Coast Guard replied in the negative, and, for the time being, the matter was dropped.

Meanwhile, back in the ocean, the group, still fairly confident that help was on the way, remained calm and collected. The four sang songs, and a barrage of bad jokes transpired (e.g., "Can I borrow a dime so that I can call the Coast Guard?"); "Will somebody get me a Someburger?" Although the temperature had dropped considerably because of the norther, the group remained warm by staying in the water and by wrapping the dacron sails around them when they were able to sit on the boat.

Alert Food Service

At 6 am the next morning, Miss Carolyn Cason, the director of the University Food Service, was notified that Adele Lewis had not reported for work in the kitchen of Hanszen College. She called the girl's roommates, found out that she had not returned to her apartment during the evening, and then called Rocky McAshan's parents, who promised to continue with the search.

During the night the boat had turned over 2 or 3 more times in the large waves, which continually broke over the foursome. At dawn Oswald decided to swim for the nearby shore and get aid. Albert Shannon, (Continued on Page 6)
Sailboat —

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a friend of McAsahan who was staying at a boat house on the bay arose at approximately the same time to go out for a morning of surfing. He saw the disabled craft and called the Coast Guard to notify them of the location.

A helicopter was immediately dispatched for what McAsahan called “a classic air-sea rescue.” The copter first landed to pick up Oswald, who was making his swim for shore, and then dropped a basket to hoist up the other three stranded passengers.

The helicopter pickup was made at approximately 7:30 am, making a total of 10 hours that the group was in the water. Fortunately none of the party was seriously hurt, although all received bruises and cuts from the boat, which continually hit against them “like a big battering ram.”

The sailboat, a Geary 18, was slightly damaged, but the damage was not irreparable. Oswald’s Goya guitar was completely ruined, and among the other lost items were one contact lens, two sweatshirts, an electric razor, and 10 cans of beer.

Oswald noted that their adventure held a good lesson for everyone in the values of physical fitness. “We were all in pretty good shape,” he commented, “and this was a big factor in our being able to hold up against the rigors of that night.”