

SA DIVERS SLIP GUARDS, FLEE IN YACHT

# Escape from Maputo

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**THREE** South African divers charged with illegal salvaging and held under armed guard in Mozambique staged a dramatic midnight escape amid gunfire and are back in South African waters.

Mr Allen Ubsdell, the skipper of the yacht *Coralita*, and brothers Michael and Richard Bailey, made their dash for freedom from Maputo harbour at 12.20 am yesterday.

In a radio link-up with the *Coralita* this morning, Michael Bailey said the decision to make a run for it came after the trio heard rumours that Mozambican authorities planned to jail Mr Ubsdell and confiscate the yacht.

"We switched off the yacht's lights and relied on radar to guide us out into deep international waters. We were shot at by our guards but no one pursued us," said Mr Bailey.

He expects the *Coralita* to dock at Richards Bay later today.

The *Coralita*'s crew of 12 was obtained off Inhaca island near Maputo on January 8. They were



Flashback: Mrs Michelle Ubsdell and her son Barry (2) after their return to South Africa.

charged with illegally salvaging brassware and bottles from a wreck, changing crew without informing the authorities and using a leisure boat for activities other than sport.

The crew vehemently denied the charges.

Those involved were: Craig and Brent Scott, Neil and Vivien Harvey, Allan and Vicky Snygaard, and Michael and Richard Bailey of Johannesburg.

All nine were apparently members of the Transvaal Underwater Research Group.

Mrs Michelle Ubsdell, her son Barry (2) and Ryan Harvey (8) were freed almost immediately.

About a week later, five more were freed. Mr Ubsdell was fined R18 890 and diving equipment

was confiscated. Maputo officials also ruled that the *Coralita* would only be returned to its owners on payment of \$80 000 or R225 860.

The South Africans appealed against the decision forcing payment on the yacht, but were turned down.

Mr Bailey said today that after an initial court appearance, the crew was told a decision would be made on their fate within 48 hours. But 10 days later, the crew were still confined to the harbour, with no official word.

"Two days ago we were told we were going to be charged with coral theft over a period of two years, which is absolutely bizarre ... ridiculous. We have never taken a piece of coral."

"We were not prepared to sit around any longer — we just want to get back home and continue our lives," said Mr Bailey.

The escape may create inter-government tensions between Pretoria and Maputo.

"We are aware of the fact that they left and are in South African waters," a spokesman for the Department of Foreign Affairs said in Cape Town today.

"We are in touch with the Mozambican authorities on the matter," he said.