

Yacht skipper Ubsdell denies having bribed Maputo official

MR ALLEN Ubsdell, who escaped from Maputo harbour aboard his yacht *Coralita* two months ago, has denied claims by a senior Mozambican harbour official that he bribed a soldier to allow him to slip away from port.

Mr Ubsdell and two fellow South Africans fled from Maputo to Richards Bay on February 12 after their yacht was confiscated and placed under armed guard following allegations that the crew plundered a shipwreck near the island of Inhaca.

According to a report in Mozambique File, the monthly digest of the AIM news agency, Mr Ubsdell allegedly fled without paying a 13 million meticals (about R20 000) fine. Maputo Maritime Administrator Ernesto Nhambe told the news agency he suspected a bribe had been paid to Corporal Armando Chavane, who was charged with guarding the boat.

Chief Reporter

"On the night in question, the corporal abandoned the yacht for unknown reasons . . . and only informed the maritime authorities of the escape an hour after the *Coralita* had left harbour.

"Mr Nhambe admitted that the corporal had opened fire — but only when the yacht was already out of port and heading for open waters," the report said.

Responding yesterday, Mr Ubsdell said: "They are just trying to cover up their own mistakes — because they were left very red-faced when I did the duck. People must understand that I had no choice — I had been abandoned by my Government."

"His guards had become careless and I saw the opportunity to escape."