

# Yacht in daring escape

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Own Correspondent

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**DURBAN.** — The crew of the South African yacht captured and held for five weeks by the Mozambique government told yesterday of their audacious escape from Maputo harbour under cover of darkness as gunfire rang over their heads.

The *Coralita*, which was impounded by Mozambique after allegations that the crew had "plundered" wrecks off Inhaca Island and smuggled aliens into Mozambique, sailed into its home port of Richards Bay yesterday afternoon.

The skipper, Mr Alan Ubsdell, 35, and brothers Mike, 27, and Richard Bailey, 25, were sunburnt and exhausted but none the worse for wear after their ordeal, in which armed guards kept them aboard the boat for more than a month.

Mr Ubsdell had stayed with his yacht throughout the ordeal, even though the maritime authorities had given the go-ahead for his 12-member crew and eventually himself to leave the country.

He said he would not leave the *Coralita* — which the Mozambicans refused to release until R255 860 had been paid — "to be pillaged and stripped".

The authorities had also imposed a R19 041 fine



**SAFELY HOME . . .** The three South Africans who fled Mozambique aboard the *Coralita*, (from left) Michael Bailey, Richard Bailey and Alan Ubsdell, the boat's skipper.

for the removal of items from a wreck without permission, using a leisure vessel for commercial purposes and changing the boat's crew without informing the authorities.

"I just got a bit fed up sitting in that dirty small craft harbour," said Mr Ubsdell after the 36-hour trip down the coast.

They roughed it in the 40-footer and were only able to leave it to fetch fresh water, wash and buy food from a quayside market under the watchful eye of AK-47-toting Frelimo soldiers and then maritime police who sat in an adjacent boat.

The trio eventually left at 20 minutes after midnight on Wednesday morning.

"We started up the motor and pushed the boat away from the quay," said Mr Ubsdell. "The guards had let us run the motor to charge the battery so they obviously weren't too concerned — they had actually got quite slack."

As they slunk off into the black harbour several shots were fired.