



Almost Terminated

Fatigue and an overconfident navigator prove to be a dangerous combination | BY JEFFREY M. STANDER

When I learned that two friends who were flying in from Melbourne, Australia, to join us in French Polynesia had landed in Ua-Huka rather than Tahuatu, where we were anchored, I knew we would have to go get them. The three of us on board—my partner Kathy, Delilah, a guest, and myself—would have to sail overnight on *Beatrix*, my 1980 44-foot Kelly-Peterson cutter, from Tahuatu to Ua-Huka.

We got underway at 2100 and headed northeast into a good breeze and large swells. Although we were ready for a fast and wet crossing, we were happy when Ua-Huka appeared on the horizon just after sunrise. When we spotted the harbor entrance, it appeared inviting and safe. After a tiring night I was anxious to get out of the wind and swells and drop the hook.

I approached the small anchorage carefully under sail and, as we entered, everything looked fine. There was a large concrete pier to starboard and a number of small open boats moored in what seemed to be the middle of the harbor off the end of the pier. We dropped the sails as we entered the harbor and I was about to get the anchor ready to go. “Do you want to review the chart?” Delilah called from below. I answered no, because I had studied the chart and had read the guides the night before and thought I had everything in my mind. The harbor looked long and well protected, but as I soon discovered, it was much shorter than it appeared on the chart and was shoaling rapidly.

As we passed the line of small fishing boats on their moorings I saw a man ashore



Jeff Stander and his partner Kathy have been living and cruising aboard *Beatrix* since 1997

waving to me, “Go back, go back.” But it was too late. Suddenly *Beatrix* hit the bottom. I spun the wheel to starboard and tried to power into deeper water. But we were hard aground on a cobblestone bottom. And with the tide ebbing, *Beatrix* was starting to gently heel over on her port side. Men on the pier started calling to me and one of them dove in and swam out to the boat. We passed him the end of a heavy 250-foot nylon line I kept on a reel under the boom gallows. He swam back ashore with it and secured the line to a bollard at the end of the pier.

I started wondering if this might be the end of my wonderful sailing adventure and began to feel numb. But then more people started arriving ashore and it was clear the community was determined to help get us off if it were possible. A large yellow backhoe arrived and more lines were run from the boat to the pier. A skiff appeared and its crew took my main anchor out to a deep spot in the harbor.

With *Beatrix* now held by her anchor and lines running ashore, I knew at least

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she couldn't be washed further up the beach. We snugged down the lines and rode and waited for the tide to turn. All of us knew that this was our best—no, our only—hope of getting free. With *Beatrix* now heeling over at a 50 degree angle, moving around the boat was weird and disturbing.

It was four hours before the tide began to turn. During that time I was in limbo. I could have cleaned the bottom, scrubbed the transducers, tested the STW paddle-wheel, or taken photographs. Instead I lived in my head, quietly wondering what would happen if *Beatrix* ended up stranded on the beach.

Delilah had gone ashore with the submersible VHF, but after her swim it could not transmit. It was submersible alright; it just didn't work after being submersed.

I realized I had to pull myself together and go ashore. And as soon as I climbed up on the pier, I met Maurice. He and his wife, Delphine, are known far and wide for their hospitality and are mentioned in all the guidebooks. Maurice told me this had happened many times before and he was confident that he and his team could re-float the boat. Using what little French I knew, I told him I was lucky to be in a place where there were so many willing hands to help me.

When finally the tide began to flood, everyone ashore turned to. Some swarmed into the water and a good number came on board. My anchor windlass is powerful enough to pull up the anchor, but I knew it couldn't kedge the boat off the beach. The circuit breaker kept tripping as the wind-



Hard around but secured in place by the anchor rode and lines run to the pier, *Beatrix* and her crew wait anxiously for the tide to turn (left); Reels with plenty of line on them are permanently mounted aft of the cockpit (right)



lass struggled to haul a 42,000-pound boat across the bottom.

Then one young man grabbed the manual windlass handle and began leaning into it. The chain began coming aboard one link at a time. The strain was so enormous I decided to use the anchor snubber,

was on her beam-ends, she was slowly beginning to move. The boat bounced a few more times, then, finally, she floated free and came upright. Everyone cheered and clapped. Relief and gratitude filled my heart as I turned on the engine. The Marquesans on the stern hauled in the line

As we passed the line of small fishing boats on their moorings I saw a man ashore waving to me, "Go back, go back." But it was too late

a heavy piece of slotted stainless steel that fits over the chain links. I attached a strong line to the snubber, pulled it up through the bow roller and then ran it aft through snatch blocks to one of the primary winches in the cockpit where Kathy, was helping

the young men on the winch keep things clear on the canted deck.

Beatrix began banging and rumbling on the cobblestones as the hull started lifting in the swell. The team on the windlass took up the slack in the rode while the man on the back-hoe took a strain on the line that ran ashore from the starboard primary winch. Meanwhile, the team on the port primary winch continued hauling in the line on the snubber.

Although *Beatrix* still

running to the pier, while the crew on the bow took in the anchor rode and pulled the anchor aboard. Slowly, I moved into the middle of the anchorage and the windlass gang dropped the anchor. We were safe!

I was embarrassed but grateful that our voyage had not ended that day. But how does one thank an entire village? Maurice in particular deserved my thanks, because he was the one who figured out how to get *Beatrix* off the shoal. Our two Melbourne friends, who were now on board, had seen us hard aground when they had flown over the anchorage on their way to the airfield. "Merde alors," was their comment, only they had said it in English. We spent the night at Baie de Hane, an anchorage just to the east, because Maurice said it would be "plus calme." Although it was better than the anchorage at Baie de Vaipae, we spent another uncomfortable night there.

We got underway early the next morn-



On Deck | VOICE OF EXPERIENCE

ing as the weather was deteriorating. We felt badly about leaving without saying goodbye and thanking more people with gifts, but the weather gave us little choice; we had to move out. When we cleared land we had a nice beam reach back to Ua-Pou and anchored right where we had been before our adventure began. Looking back on it now, it's clear to me that I failed to follow three of my cardinal rules: anticipate problems, be cautious, and never indulge in wishful thinking.

An old friend once told me that good judgment comes from experience, and experience comes from bad judgment. Though my grounding proved this is true, I'm happy to say *Beatrix* is still cruising the Pacific and hopefully will continue to do so for many years. **A**

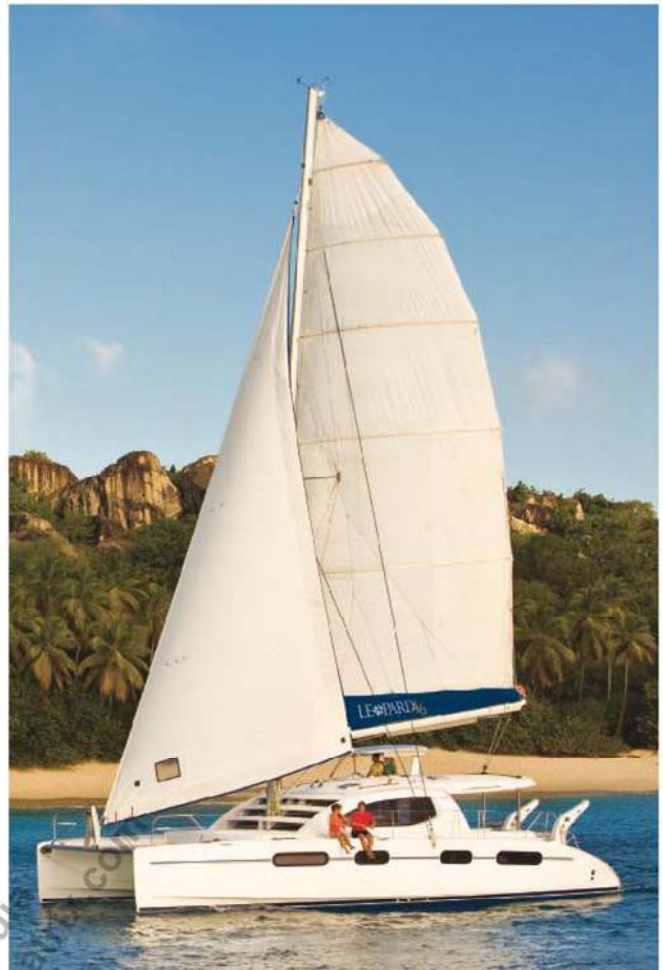
HINDSIGHT

WHAT WE DID RIGHT:

- I had 450ft of anchor chain, 600ft of 5/8in nylon doublebraid line and 250ft of three-strand line on reels ready to go. I had put eye-splices at both ends of each line for use in emergencies and for jury-rigging.
- I had a long manual winch handle I had custom made in Mexico. The short handle that came with the winch would have been useless in this situation. Even so, the longer handle was barely strong enough to work the windlass.
- Once I had confidence in the local experts, I let them take charge.

WHAT WE DID WRONG:

- Fatigue and the desire to drop the anchor trumped my judgment and experience. It is much harder to make a good decision after sailing all night.
- I should not have entered the anchorage sailing downwind with the mainsail up.
- I should have dropped the main outside but also have been ready to hoist it, and the jib if necessary, if the engine failed.
- The anchor wasn't ready to deploy. When entering a harbor it should be ready to drop at any time in case the engine fails.
- I was not cautious enough entering the unfamiliar anchorage. I let myself be fooled by the long pier, the line of moored small boats and the apparent calm of the inner harbor. I should have studied the chart again closely, and been ready to reverse course at the first sign of a problem.
- The anchoring equipment was not perfect. The anchor windlass, already barely adequate for my new 3/8in chain, was in need of a motor with 25 percent more power. If I get a new windlass, I will install the largest one I can afford in the space that is available.



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