

# Ship's 'fright night' turns deadly real

20/8/03  
The first return

Drew Warne-Smith



IT was "fright night" aboard a luxury cruise ship when a three-hour rescue mission began.

With a Tom Jones impersonator winding down and the fancy-dress party in full swing, a 52-year-old Australian man hurdled the handrail on the 46,000-tonne Pacific Sky after an alcohol-fuelled argument with his wife.

P&O Cruises' staff watched in horror as the passenger plunged into the Coral Sea, 25 nautical miles west of Noumea, about 8pm AEST on Saturday.

In his 33-year career, Captain Nick Carlton had never heard the cry of "man overboard".

After notifying authorities in New Caledonia and Australia, Captain Carlton ordered a "Williamson turn" to steer the liner back along its previous course.

In 25-knot winds and rough seas, the ship made four unsuccessful sweeps, with crew lining the deck and a spotlight on the surrounding seas.

After nearly three hours,

**'It was all a tremendous relief, a wonderful feeling. A lot of people had given him up'**

Nick Carlton  
Ship's captain

with the Pacific Sky coasting at just 5 knots and the air-conditioning turned off to reduce noise, the man was found when an officer on the bow heard a scream.

"It was a tremendous relief, a wonderful feeling. A lot of people had given him up," Captain Carlton said.

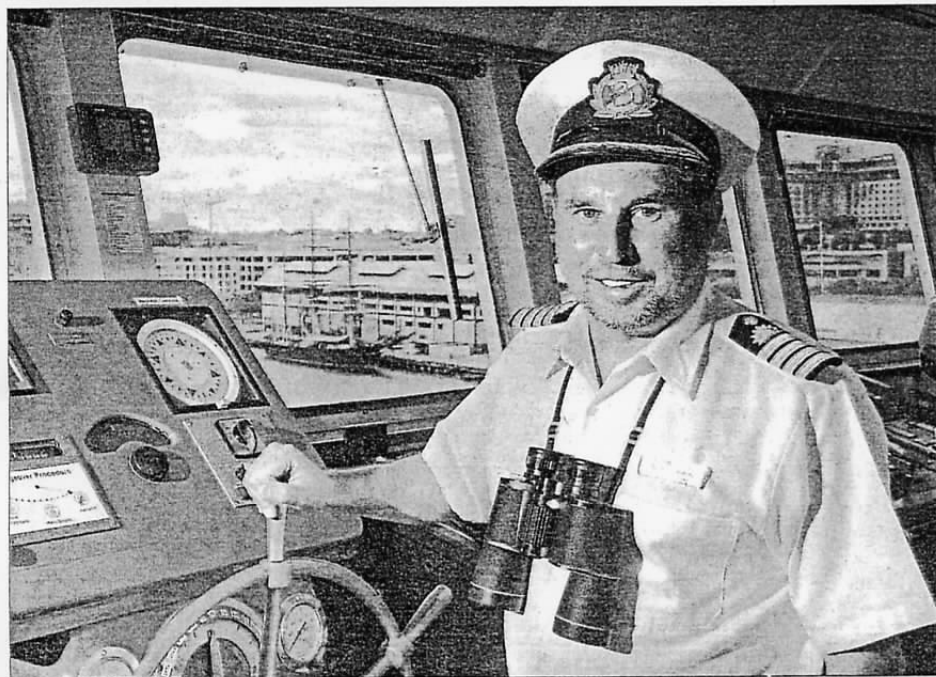
A lifeboat was lowered and the man hauled to safety.

Despite breaking his wrist as he leapt overboard, the passenger managed to remove his clothes and shoes to help stay afloat, Captain Carlton, 51, said.

"As soon as he hit the water, I reckon he changed his mind and realised it was a bad idea. He's one very lucky man."

The man was hospitalised when the Pacific Sky returned yesterday morning.

The man was accompanied on the 11-day cruise by his wife, two daughters and his brother and sister-in-law. It is understood he had recently undergone quadruple bypass surgery.



Sheer relief: Captain Carlton on the Pacific Sky in Sydney yesterday, and the man, top, is taken back on board on Saturday Picture: Chris Pavlich