

RESCUE AT SEA

T&T Coast Guard helps save
shipwrecked French family

-Story by Joel Julien on Page 5



SAVED: Pascal Bazin, right, his son Alexis, wife Joelle and daughter Melanie onboard the *TTS Chacachacare* yesterday after being rescued by Coast Guard personnel on Sunday night.

At left, Coast Guard officials inspect the life raft yesterday at Staubles Bay, that the French family were found inside on the waters between St Vincent and Grenada.

-Photos: ROBERTO CODALLO



Lost at sea for 4 days

Coast Guard saves
French family

Joel Julien

jjulien@trinidadexpress.com

SHIPWRECKED and lost at sea for four days, four members of a French family, among them two children, were saved by the local Coast Guard on Sunday night.

Battling choppy waters in the dead of night, the Bazin family, originally from Nantes in south France, were rescued between St Vincent and the Grenadines and Grenada.

Speaking with the aid of a translator, Pascal Bazin, the father of the family and the ship's captain, relived the ordeal to members of the media at Staubles Bay yesterday.

Bazin said his family, wife Joelle, daughter Melanie and son Alexis left Martinique and were on their way to vacation in nearby Venezuela.

The family's catamaran had been docked in Martinique since April, after the Bazins made a successful cross-Atlantic journey from France.

While sailing to Venezuela the Bazins encountered terrible weather conditions, including heavy rains and choppy waters, Bazin said.

A big wave crashed against the catamaran, cracking its hull, Bazin said.

Then one after the other waves crashed against the weakened hull causing it to open, Bazin said.

Eventually the hull broke, water gushed in and the boat began to sink, he said. Bazin said he tried to repair the boat but eventually decided to abandon ship. Bazin said he rushed his family into the boat's life raft. This all happened on Christmas Day (December 25).

A distress signal was sent. A collaborative effort between several regional Coast Guard units, including Barbados, Martinique and Trinidad and Tobago, was launched.

Both Barbados and Martinique launched aircraft to search for the lost family.

Then there was a breakthrough. On Sunday night, one of the Barbados aircraft spotted a flare fired in the sky.

They requested backup from the local Coast Guard.

The Trinidad and Tobago Coast Guard is responsible of all search and rescue up to St Vincent because of its maritime capability, Lt Kirk Jean-Baptiste, public relations officer of the Civil/Naval Affairs Unit, explained yesterday.

Using the *TTS Chacachacare*, a 20-member crew went in search of the Bazins. Around 8.30 p.m. on Sunday, "in the dead of night", the Bazins's life raft was found.

The Pacific 24 (speedboat) was launched from the Coast Guard vessel and the Bazins along with their life raft were brought on board the *TTS Chacachacare*.

"It takes extreme skill to find someone in the dead of night under those conditions, the crew deserves to get recognition for their efforts," Jean-Baptiste said yesterday.

Inside the life raft were bags of water, several flares, a medical kit, rations, torchlights and other survival tools. The Coast Guard believes these tools were instrumental in the family surviving on the seas for four days.

The Bazins were yesterday handed over to French Embassy after they were medically examined.

Consul Andre Noe and Visa officer Marina Nimrod visited the family at Staubles Bay yesterday.

When contacted yesterday the French Embassy said plans were in place to have the Bazins housed in a local hotel.

Despite the near fatal accident Bazin said he still wants to sail.



SEA FOOD: A Coast Guard seaman who was part of the *TTS Chacachacare* crew that saved the Bazin family on Sunday night shows the rations onboard at Staubles Bay, that the French family were found with as they were rescued. —Photo: ROBERTO CODALLO