

CREW OF ASTRAL RESCUED

Difficult Operation In High Seas

LYTTELTON MAN'S FEAT

(New Zealand Press Association)

WELLINGTON, Jan. 28.

The six men of the crew of the Astral were rescued from the crippled cutter in violent seas about 20 miles off the Clarence river at dawn on Saturday. With heaving lines round their waists, the men jumped one by one into the sea and were hauled to the safety of the 41-ton fishing vessel Tawera, which had been towing the yacht for the previous 12 hours. The Tawera then fought her way to Wellington.

Her master, Mr George Brasell, of Lyttelton, said the ship did everything but "turn inside out."

"On the trip we had one consolation," he said. "We knew the sea couldn't get any worse. Visibility was almost nil."

The ship reached Wellington about 1 p.m. Officials of the Royal Port Nicholson Yacht Club rushed the six yachtsmen away to bed. Mr Brasell and his crew went straight to bed on a neighbouring yacht. They had had little sleep since leaving Lyttelton on Thursday night.

The Astral's skipper, Brian Miller, of Hataitai, was first taken to the Wellington Public Hospital for treatment for facial cuts. He was injured on Thursday when the cutter was struck by a gigantic cross wave.

"It was about 4 a.m. and we were 60 miles from Lyttelton," said Mr Miller. "Suddenly this wave came crashing aboard. It snapped the mast four feet from the deck. I was thrown across the cabin. We managed to set a small sail on the stump of the broken mast and then tried to run back to Cape Campbell, but it was impossible. The sea had us beaten from the outset."

About 3 a.m. on Friday the Astral was sighted by a search aircraft from Wigram. This circled the Astral and dropped oil to smooth the sea. Not far away was the rescue ship Tawera. She had been hove-to near the yacht all night, but had not known the yacht was there. It was not long before the yacht was taken in tow, but just after the dark the tow line snapped. The waves were so steep that it was impossible to attach another line, and the two vessels drifted within signalling distance for the rest of the night.

"At daybreak it was still dangerous to try and connect a tow line. It was decided the men should jump overboard and be hauled to the fishing vessel..."