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By Bob Krauss  
*Advertiser Columnist*

A Hokule'a crewman fell overboard while hanging over the side to go to the toilet during last week's New Zealand-Tonga cruise — and only a well-rehearsed "man overboard" drill saved his life, it was reported yesterday.

The only crew members on deck when the early-morning accident occurred aboard the Hawaiian voyaging canoe were the steersman and navigator Nainoa Thompson, who stays half awake most of the time on his perch aft.

"Everybody else was asleep," said Myron Thompson, president of the Polynesian Voyaging Society. "This man was taking a crap. He had his safety harness on, but a defective buckle came loose.

"Nainoa saw a yellow cap go by in the water. He yelled, 'Man overboard!' The whole crew responded immediately and did exactly what they were supposed to do. That saved the man's life."

Myron Thompson said they threw out a life ring with lights and a homing beacon. Dorcas, the escort boat, charged full speed toward the radio signal.

Nainoa Thompson went off on a surfboard carried for such emergencies and brought the man in 15 minutes after he went overboard, Myron Thompson said.

Four days of very heavy seas battered Hokule'a before its arrival in Tonga on Sunday (Honolulu time), Thompson said. The waves coming broadside cracked the gunwales and they'll need two days of repair in Tonga.

The canoe then will sail for a three-day voyage to the VaVau group, with a Tongan pilot to steer through the reefs.

*Hokule'a lesson on keeping  
your 'head' above water*