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Adrift 66 days, pair survived on raw fish

By Barry Witt
Knight-Ridder News Service

A self-described "survivor with a will to live" yesterday said he caught fish with his hands to feed himself and his wife for 66 days while floating adrift in the Pacific Ocean until their rescue Saturday 30 miles off Costa Rica.

William Butler, 60, and his wife, Simone, 52, of Miami, said they were two months into a scheduled four-year, around-the-world expedition when their sloop was attacked 1,200 miles off the Central American coast by a pod of whales on June 15.

Their boat sank within minutes of the 4 a.m. attack, and they said they spent the next two harrowing months in a six-foot, inflatable river raft, living on the raw fish they caught and water they purified with a small desalinator they'd brought along.

The U.S. Coast Guard said the Butlers drifted east on a

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Couple survived 66 days adrift on raft in Pacific

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northern equatorial current at a speed of about a half a knot.

In a telephone interview from his hospital bed in Golfito, Costa Rica, last night, Butler said they spotted nearly 40 ships but couldn't flag any down until the Costa Rican Coast Guard searching for a shrimp boat happened upon them Saturday afternoon.

Butler, a retired General Elec-

tric engineer and private exporter, said his 40-foot sloop, the Siboney, was attacked by the largest of a pod of whales.

"They started bashing the boat around until they finally holed the fiberglass," he said. "We heard the water coming in, sent a mayday, loaded the life raft and in 15 minutes the boat sank."

They punctured a hole in the raft as they climbed aboard, but "just by the grace of God, the hole we opened was exactly the

same size as the patch we had," said Butler, a sailor since the age of 8.

The Butlers had provisions for about 15 days, "and then after that we went for about three or four days and figured we had to solve this problem," he said.

They had a single fishing hook to work with, but no bait.

"When a turtle came by, I pulled him out of the water and cut his throat. That started our food chain," Butler said.

He used the remains of the

triggerfish he caught to attract other fish, but three to four weeks ago he lost the hook. From then on, he said, he dangled bait over the side of the raft with one hand and grabbed the fish that came by with the other.

"I forced myself to to eat almost two pounds of raw fish a day and I forced my wife to eat it, too," he said. "I made her drink her liter of water."

Butler and his wife lost about 50 pounds each.