



At the Forbidden Islands, we found a huge reef and parked on its leeward side, where it bent in, next to two shipwrecks. That was heavy, because we thought, “Hey, that could’ve been us.”

It was semi-sheltered on the reef’s leeward side, so we went to sleep. The next day, a few guys went surfing along the reef, and Healy decided to go freediving by himself.

About a half-hour after the guys went out, a giant squall appeared out of nowhere and nailed us from behind—the boat was anchored facing the reef. It was the kind of squall in which you can’t see five inches in front of your face. Total whiteout. Gnarly, gnarly

squall, creating whirlpools and rip currents around the boat—it was heavy.

The squall hit so fast that no one had time to react. The surfers were a quarter-mile away, and Healy was diving somewhere way off the reef.

Then the squall pushed our boat straight up onto the reef, and suddenly we were stuck on dry coral, listing sideways. The captain was running around screaming, and everyone was just freaking. We were about fifteen hours from land, and we couldn’t see Healy or the surfers. Some of the guys were practically in tears—that’s how scared they were. We were basically shipwrecked.

We had two huge brand-new

25-foot Zodiacs on the boat. The crew threw them off and drove around in the whiteout squall trying to find Healy and the surfers. There was no navy around there, and no one who could help us, so we had to get ourselves out of it.

They found the surfers and Healy, who were all ghost-white with fear. Then they drove the dinghies around to the other side of the boat and started ramming it at full speed, trying to get it off the reef. It took a while, but it worked.

The captain dove down to assess the damage, which thankfully wasn’t too bad. Then we took a vote of who wanted to keep heading out

to the Forbidden Islands and who wanted to go back to Suva. Those of us who wanted to keep going won the vote 5-3.

So we left and almost immediately hit an even bigger storm, by far the gnarliest I’ve ever experienced. It was huge. It was one of those storms that only happen once a year down there. It was impossible to sleep, so we were all just white-knuckling it, holding on for dear life. Everyone was puking and totally freaking out.

Then the boat’s septic tank broke, so the whole boat reeked of raw sewage. Next, all the banging and shaking opened these barrels of kerosene and gasoline that were up top, so we had gas and kerosene dripping through our cabins’ skylights and down onto our beds. The whole boat smelled like a combination of shit, gas, and kerosene.

The storm’s force tossed one of the dinghies into the air, which came down and impaled itself on a pole-straight through the metal of this brand-new Zodiac.

I was so bummed because the swell was so huge, and the waves had to have been all-time out in those Forbidden Islands. We just couldn’t get there that week. If we had had three weeks, we could’ve just waited it out.

Midway through the night, the captain decided to turn around and head back to Suva, so we drove sixteen hours through the storm to the harbor. By then, we had one day left in Fiji, so we surfed Frigates again and flew home the next day — with no photos. ●

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