

SAR

Search and rescue

vessels such things are more in the category of a quaint old anachronism perpetuated by the Royal Navy – with the exception, of course, of lifeboat crews and yachts who take their safety drill conscientiously. Perhaps with these two incidents fresh in our minds, it is time to look again at the drills and procedures for dealing with such situations.

In the case of the lost diver, even more serious questions arise. There is no doubt that the highest state of the professional art of skin diving is practised by the Royal Navy. Their professional expertise is respected by diving companies and the amateurs who belong to the British sub aqua club and the Scottish sub aqua club. One basic safety rule in the professional handbooks is that there always should be a 'buddy' diver on the surface, ready to go to the rescue in the event of trouble under water. Unfortunately, there are many examples of dives being undertaken by a single diver, with nobody but a person who can merely handle the boat to attend to his needs on the surface. The frustration that the SAR services feel when a diver is reported overdue in such circumstances is considerable. The lack of any means for the diver to indicate his position, in the event of trouble, is also a factor in the many cases. These dangers have been well-known for years. This is certainly not the first occasion that a diver has been lost in similar circumstances. Unfortunately memories fade quickly. It is the duty of all of us who know the details of previous incidents to remind those who indulge in unsafe diving practices that the penalty to be paid all too often is loss of life.

Ocean Monarch

By David Roberts, DRC, Aberdeen
SRR

Once again tragedy has struck the NE Scotland fishing community. This time the casualty was the Buckie fishing vessel, *Ocean Monarch*, which is thought to have foundered in vile weather near the Beryl oilfield in the early hours of 15 December, when all seven of her crew perished.

At 1028 on 15 December, Aberdeen MRCC was informed via the fishing vessel open line that six fishing vessels were experiencing very heavy weather, six miles west of Beryl A platform. Concern was being felt about a seventh, *Ocean Monarch* (BF144), with whom the last contact had been at 0420 that morning, when she was dodging 30 miles WSW of Beryl. The wind at this time at the Beryl platform was ESE at 70 knots, with gusts to 87 knots, generating waves of 45 to 60 feet, with snow showers.

The extreme weather had brought down the main aerials of some of the fishing vessels in

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Having been blown from its moorings on the Tartan field (100 nm ENE of Aberdeen) by storm-force easterly winds on 15 December, the 50,000 ton crane barge *Hermod* requested the urgent evacuation of all non-essential personnel. Thirteen aircraft (12 S-61 N and one Puma) from Bristow Helicopters' Aberdeen base took part in the subsequent operation, making a total of 23 flights, and bringing back 527 men. The operation, which took place initially in snow showers and winds in excess of 70 knots, was completed in darkness some six hours later, and was complicated by the barge's lowered cranes partially obstructing its helideck. This forced aircraft to land on backwards in a very confined space, with the additional hazard of turbulence generated by the adjacent structures, and the considerable movement of the deck. A moderation in the weather enabled a line to be passed, and the barge was eventually towed well clear of land, and into adequate sea room south of its original position. The incident was reported to HM Coastguard.

the area, and, while it was thought possible that *Ocean Monarch* might have been similarly affected, an urgency broadcast was nevertheless initiated by Aberdeen MRCC. When this brought no information, an air search by LRMP aircraft was requested, and a Nimrod was allocated by RCC Air Edinburgh. This aircraft, rescue 01, was on scene at 1248, and carried out searches as requested by MRCC until 1840 in atrocious conditions, with frequently no forward visibility. The searches were unproductive, and it was decided to resume at first light the following morning.

On completion of the afternoon search by rescue 01, without radar contact with the vessel, it had been concluded that *Ocean Monarch* had probably been overwhelmed, and that the emphasis for subsequent search should be for liferafts (two of which were known to have been carried by the vessel) and wreckage. A link call with one of the vessels in the area had established the fact that *Ocean Monarch*, when last in contact, had expressed the possible intention of running for Shetland, but had been advised against this. It is not known whether the skipper accepted this advice.

During the late evening of 15 December, the wind had eased to force 8/9, later moderating even more, and one of the seven fishing vessels in the area informed Aberdeen MRCC that they all intended to institute a search for *Ocean Monarch* from her last known position towards Shetland, as soon as conditions allowed them to do so, which was at 2315. HMS *Orkney* had sailed from West Shetland, and was approaching the search area; this was passed an updated datum with probability area, and requested to assume the duties of on scene commander.

At 0347 on 16 December, HMS *Orkney* reported that she had reached the datum, and was in contact with the fishing vessels in the area. It had also been agreed with RCC Air Edinburgh for the Nimrod to be on task at 0730, to search for liferafts and wreckage in an area 40 by 20 miles established by

By James D. Ferguson, Scottish correspondent, *Flight International*

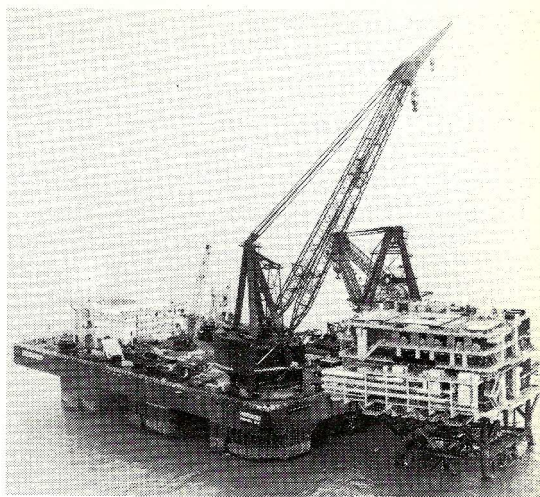


Photo: Bristow Helicopters, Aberdeen

Hermod, a crane barge in trouble in December. For the rescue carried out by Bristow Helicopters, the Helicopter Association of America made a special award to BHL at the 1980 HAA Convention in Las Vegas.

Aberdeen MRCC.

Nimrod rescue 02 reported at 0950 a large number of fish boxes and boards within the search area, some of which were recovered by mfv *Emma Thompson*, and considered to have come from *Ocean Monarch*. Using this position as a new datum, another smaller search area was defined, and passed to all concerned.

The German vessel *Adeline* reported at 1153 that she had sighted a damaged and empty liferaft marked *Ocean Monarch* within the search area, and a few minutes later rescue 02 reported sighting a second empty liferaft, some eight miles from the first, and slightly south of the search area, 23 and 17 miles respectively from the wreckage. Both these liferafts were recovered by HMS *Orkney*, and it was established from their serial numbers that they were in fact the two which had been carried by *Ocean Monarch*. In neither case had the drogues been streamed, nor was there any indication that either liferaft had at any time been occupied. The total drift of the liferafts, which were full of water, after 31 hours, was 48 and 53 miles respectively. It was clear now that there would be no possibility of any survivors: and it was concluded that *Ocean Monarch* had foundered with all hands, and the search was accordingly abandoned.

Tragic though the loss of this vessel and her crew has been, it was nevertheless gratifying to have had the fishing vessel open line used as it was intended, and this enabled Aberdeen MRCC to establish a reasonably accurate datum from the outset.

When compiling the areas to be searched for the liferafts, the criteria for wind-induced currents were applied as postulated in the SAR manual, although reservations have been felt for some time at Aberdeen about the validity of the tabulations. It may be of interest, that in the case of one of the liferafts, the influence of wind-induced current has since been calculated as having been 2.14 per cent of windspeed at 13 degrees to the right of the downwind direction, and for the second liferaft