

Griffins to the rescue !



3 Dramatic rescue operations that made the world news within seven weeks of each other

Rescue 1: Salla II

In the evening of 11 Dec 09, the freight ship Salla II put out a distress call informing that it was sinking in very bad weather with 12 souls on board. The vessel was reported at over

100nm from the Cypriot coast. Three surface vessels in the area conducted a search throughout the night and one survivor was recovered in the early hours of the morning.

At first light, 84 Sqn was scrambled to assist in the search. Over the next two days, two aircraft provided almost continuous daylight coverage of the allocated search areas with one aircraft continuing the search on a third day before being called off. To increase the time on scene, diplomatic clearance was sought to refuel in Israel. Only 5 survivors were found of the all-Ukrainian crew, all recovered on the afternoon of 12th December.

Rescue 2: Danny F II

A distress call was picked up on the afternoon of 17th December as the livestock transporter Danny F II capsized and sank in bad weather. The ship's British captain is reported to have remained onboard when the ship rolled over in the high seas off the coast of Tripoli, Lebanon. It was carrying six passengers, 77 crew, 10,224 sheep and 17,932 head of cattle.

One helicopter from 84 Squadron "Rescue 50" (ZJ706) was scrambled that evening to assist in the search for survivors. Due to the distance from Akrotiri it was temporarily operated from Larnaca Airport. Although not equipped to winch at night, the helicopter used its night vision camera and searchlight to identify survivors in the water and guide rescue boats to the life rafts. Rescue efforts were hampered by 3 metre waves and dead animals in the water.

Returning to Akrotiri after midnight, FBH engineers worked through the night to carry out 25 and 100 hour scheduled maintenance to ensure that maximum possible flying hours would be available for operations. A second Griffin HAR2 was re-roled to full SAR configuration to enable a further aircraft if required.

Rescue 50 departed Akrotiri again at 04:20 on the 18th December to be at the scene at first light to continue the search along with German Navy and a Cypriot Police helicopter. Rescue 51 (ZJ705) also departed from Akrotiri to provide a replacement aircraft and crew in the search area. 45 casualties were recovered but, sadly, thirty people were still missing when the search was finally called off.

Rescue 3: Ethiopian Airlines ET 409

84 Squadron were called into action after an Ethiopian Airlines Boeing 737 crashed into the sea just minutes after take off from the Lebanese capital Beirut on the 25th January.

At 05.00 the duty 84 Sqn crew plus FBH duty engineer were planning for the operation, at 08.30 all diplomatic clearances had been obtained and "Rescue 50" (Griffin ZJ705) departed to their designated search area, two miles off the Lebanon coast.

The International Search & Rescue operation was initially commanded by a German logistics ship attached to the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) and later in the day a French maritime patrol aircraft took over as on-site commander.

The search continued all day with Rescue 50 refuelling in Beirut. The airborne search for survivors was called off at last light. No survivors were found - all 90 souls on board were lost. Investigations into the cause of the crash continue.

