



The Lifeboat 'MONA' Disaster 8th December 1959



Report of M.V. "Pharos"

M.V. "Pharos"

Granton

14th December, 1959

Sir,

I beg to report the sequence of events leading up to the rescue of the crew of the North Carr Lightship, and its eventual recovery from the precarious position of Babbet Ness, that of 1.2 miles, 074 degrees.

The first intimation I had of the North Carr Lightship parting its moorings was about 03.30 a.m. on the 8th instant from Mr Renwick by telephone to my home.

My course of action was to get to sea as soon as possible, and was ready to sail at 06.30 a.m. The weather prevailing at the time was South East by east force 8/9, with quite a swell at the entrance to the harbour, and range at our berth, this constituted a hazard, and found it prudent to wait until nearer high water which was at 09.00 a.m. In the meantime the tow ropes from the fore hold were got ready. I sailed at 08.15 a.m.

On my arrival on board at 04.20 a.m., I made radio contact with Mr Rosie, Master, North Carr Lightship, and kept this contact every 30 minutes until our arrival at the lightship when continuous R/t watch was kept. At 04.45 a.m., Mr Rosie informed me that the main cable had parted, and at the moment was now riding to port emergency anchor, and holding.

I spoke on R/T to Fifeness Coastguard and he informed me that the lightship was 346 degrees 2 miles from its position at 03.15 a.m.

At 05.10 a.m., I tried to contact Broughty Ferry Lifeboat, having been informed that she was proceeding to the North Carr Lightship. I got no reply to my signals. We now know the reason why.

At 07.15 a.m., when speaking to Mr Rosie he told me that the port anchor cable had parted at the compressor, and had let go the starboard anchor and was paying out cable gradually. I was later informed that the anchor was holding. About 07.30 a.m., in reviewing the situation regarding the lightship and the severity of the weather, I telephoned Mr Renwick and said I thought it would be advisable that a salvage tug should be summoned immediately to render assistance. This was approved.

I arrived at the North Carr Lightship at noon, the weather by this time East South east 8/9, with a tremendous steep sea and swell, which was aggravated by the shallow water and tide.



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The Admiralty tug "Earner" arrived about 03.30 p.m., and from 4.00 p.m. until 8.00 p.m., efforts were made to pass a line by rocket between tug and lightship. Several were secured, but the line parted when hauling in the messenger. I now gave very serious consideration regarding the rescue of the men on the lightship. It was impossible to launch a boat, and doubted very much if an inflatable raft would survive in the curling seas, and so, talking it over with the tug master and Mr Rosie, on the R/T, decided the lesser risk was to leave the men on board the lightship until first light. During the night continuous R/T communication was kept and continuous radar check on the lightship's position in case of dragging or parting her cable. The tug "Earner" and ourselves keeping in close proximity should the inevitable happen.

Day break on the morning of the 9th inst., saw no improvement in the weather, further attempts were made to pass a line across, but all without success. A dan buoy was then floated down to the tug from the lightship, though contact was made, the line parted.

By 11.30 a.m., the time had arrived when I had to make the decision to have the crew of the lightship taken off by the only means available, and that by helicopter. The Master of the tug "Earner" and Mr Rosie concurred. A signal was sent to N.L.B. and Rosyth, the latter by "Earner".

Two helicopters arrived at 12.30 p.m., and rescue operations were completed by 1.27 p.m.

The Lightship was left with a riding light and the Coastguard, Fifeness, asked to keep a look-out on it, to which he readily agreed. I returned to Granton Roads to anchor for the night.

10th inst., When attending N. L. Office, signal received from Rosyth reporting improved weather conditions. Mr Hosie, Mr Leask and 4 ratings were embarked, but prior to sailing for rendezvous with tug "Earner", one of the North Carr ratings, A. Gallacher, showed signs of reaction from his recent ordeal, and was landed at Granton.

After leaving Granton a signal received from "Earner", who was within sight of lightship, confirmed my earlier opinion that weather conditions made it impossible to board the lightship. Heavy south east swell, and moderate to fresh south east wind. Under these circumstances I anchored in Aberlady Bay at 6.45 p.m.

11th inst., Weather reports from Coastguard, Fifeness and Bell Rock reported improvement in weather conditions, and on the forecast, proceeded to the Lightship. The weather on arrival, moderate south east swell and wind south east 4. A boarding party, consisting of Mr Rosie, Mr Leask, 3 North Carr ratings, also 4 seamen and one greaser from "Pharos" were put on board to assist in connecting tow and heaving up anchors.

On arrival of tug our motor-boat ran the towing wire to Lightship and once connected the operation of heaving up anchors commenced. The kedge anchor was hove up to the hawse pipe and still an hour's heaving of the starboard anchor and cable, when the wind freshened considerably, with the resultant short dangerous sea in the shallow water. The Master of the tug was getting anxious as he was having difficulty in keeping his ship head to sea, and so endangering the whole operation. I too



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was getting anxious in the picking up of our launch, so reluctantly, the starboard cable was slipped and the Lightship taken in tow by tug at 11.30 p.m.

At 4.40 p.m. in Leith roads, the tug "Earner" handed over the Lightship to Leith tugs, when she was taken into Leith.

I sent signals to Master of tug "Earner", Fifeness Coastguard Station, Captain Williamson, M.V. "May", and Mr Aldebert P.L.K., St Abb's Head Lighthouse for their great help and co-operation during this operation. May I pay tribute to Mr Rosie for the very efficient manner in which he carried out his part.

I am

Your obedient servant

(sig) J.W. Hunter, Master.