

International Tug & OSV

INCORPORATING SALVAGE NEWS

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Engine Room: 14-page section on the latest innovations

Blaine Dempke: "The culture of a company comes from the top down"

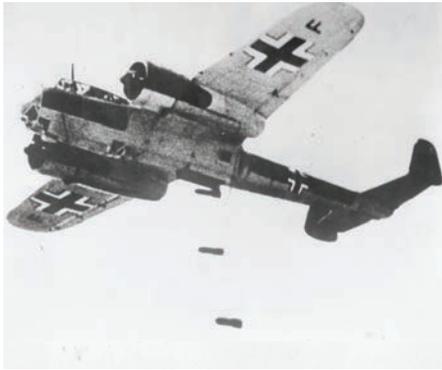
Watertight doors: Complacency can kill

German bomber recovered from Channel

Seatech Civil and Marine Ltd, based in Southampton, has recovered a WWII German bomber aircraft which was shot down during the Battle of Britain in 1940.

The Dornier 17z had been submerged beneath 15m of water for more than 70 years. It is the only known example of an aircraft of its kind, and was lifted from Goodwin Sands in the English Channel on 10th June. The wreck is believed to be the aircraft with call-sign 5K-AR. Two of the four crew members died and were buried

▼ *A Dornier 17z over London during WWII.*



elsewhere, and two – including the pilot – survived to become prisoners of war.

Earlier plans to lift the Luftwaffe aircraft had been hampered by bad weather conditions and strong winds in the area. Specialist salvage divers from Seatech Civil and Marine's sister company, Seatech Commercial Diving Services Ltd, had worked around the clock in difficult diving conditions in order to assemble a lifting frame around the aircraft.

Following that abortive effort, equipment was then attached to what was believed to be the strongest parts of the aircraft's frame in order to raise it whole in a single lift, instead of using a constructed cage around it, which had been the original plan.

A Sheerleg crane, owned and operated by subcontractors GPS Marine Contractors Ltd, was used to lift the aircraft on board one of GPS's floating barges, with the plan then being to tow it along the River Thames by one of GPS's tugs. The next stage of the operation was transport by road to RAF Cosford, which was carried out by specialist haulage contractor Abnormal Load Services Ltd (ALS).

The Dornier will be subjected to a

conservation process at RAF Cosford before eventually going on display in the new Battle of Britain exhibition at the RAF Museum located in Hendon.

PhD students from the Imperial College were working with artefacts already recovered from the aircraft by Seatech during a dive survey last year, in order to develop a new conservation process that will eliminate all traces of corrosive salt water from the aircraft's delicate aluminium frame.

Seatech were awarded the contract after a lengthy tendering process, which involved numerous presentations and meetings with the RAF Museum, who were convinced that Seatech's extensive salvage experience, combined with the specialist marine equipment of GPS and the specialist haulage capability of ALS, would give the difficult and challenging project the best possible chance of success.

Whilst this type of recovery had never been attempted before, Seatech relied on its prior experience gained in numerous countries, such as India, Egypt, Italy and South America. GPS has also been involved in salvage operations throughout Europe, whilst ALS has experience of road transporting historic aircraft.

When should the industry 'take a stand'?

Simon Tatham asks if there will ever be a time when owners or P&I Clubs challenge the courts if faced with unreasonable/uncommercial requirements from local authorities.

At the time of writing, the cost of the operation to remove *Costa Concordia* is predicted to reach US\$1.17bn, breaking through into the International Group of P&I Club's third general excess layer of P&I insurance, the first claim ever to do so. The vessel reportedly cost US\$450m to build and that it might cost over twice that to remove from the rocks of the island of Giglio is patently absurd.

When the International Group's Large Casualty Working Party presented its findings to the ISU in March of this year, swiftly followed by the publication of Lloyd's report to the market on *Challenges and Implications of Removing Shipwrecks in the 21st Century*, the cost of the operation was estimated at US\$560m. Both reports cited government influence as the dominant factor in rising wreck removal costs. In the *Costa Concordia* case, the authorities' concern over the preservation of the local pristine marine environment dictated that the vessel be removed in one piece. Estimates for the removal by the simpler method of cutting her into sections were reportedly in the order of US\$250m. The attitude of the authorities is reminiscent of the aftermath of *Exxon Valdez*, which led to OPA 90 when the phrase "you spill, we bill" was first coined. As that notorious incident demonstrated however,

nature has a remarkable ability to recover when left to its own devices.

P&I resources are likewise remarkable. However, the most expensive claim in history, whilst tragic as 32 persons lost their lives, cannot be characterised as a catastrophic loss involving pollution damage, or extensive loss of life, which risks have been the main justification for having in place such extensive insurance cover. With wreck removal claims now forming the single fastest-growing type of loss on the International Group's books, there are, as a result, some very concerned people in the insurance markets. Three decades of legislation enforcing more stringent international safety standards across the shipping industry has had a measurable impact upon losses, in particular helping to reduce pollution. It is, however, much more difficult to control local politicians and so-called competent authorities, and although the Nairobi Wreck Convention will bring a degree of uniformity of approach, once in force (see July/August 2013 edition of *IT&O*), the direct action element enabling states to pursue insurers direct will arguably make matters worse for the Clubs.

The time has therefore surely come for the shipping industry, the Clubs in particular, in the right case, to withdraw co-operation, take a stand, and seek to challenge in the



▲ *Simon Tatham.*

courts the decisions of local authorities deemed to be commercially unreasonable. As legislation or regulation seldom deals directly with the precise extent of local or national governmental powers in relation to such incidents, mounting a legal challenge would have the effect of bringing the usual process of wreck removal by consensus to a tactical halt.

The response of the authorities may be to exert pressure by detaining the crew, if they remain present in the jurisdiction, threaten the prosecution of company individuals as was seen by the vendetta waged by the French authorities in the aftermath of *Erica*, or threaten to conduct the operation themselves and then send the bill. However, with *Costa Concordia*, the master and others are in any event being prosecuted, and, realistically, can one envisage the island of Giglio or the Italian government funding a US\$1.17bn or even a US\$250m operation?

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