

Report on the Rescue of Survivors from the Wreck of
M/T "Hildina" by Skipper Pennington of M/T "Velia".

At about 0815 hours on the 1st December, M/T "Velia" was fishing in a position 50 miles N x W of Sale Skerry in 140 fms. water when the skipper received an S.O.S. message stating that a vessel in the vicinity was "turning over, and fast" (abbreviated message). This S.O.S. was repeated to all ships on Distress Wave. "Velia" called "Idena" and told her to call "Gavina" but there was no response - these vessels were then fishing about 120 miles to East of "Velia"'s position. "Idena" was then informed that "Velia" would haul her gear in readiness for emergency. The skipper commenced to haul and whilst hauling "Gavina" called "Velia" and reported all well with her and concluded it was "Hildina" in distress. Skipper Pennington immediately ordered the gear to be cut away and "Velia" proceeded at full speed towards "Hildina"'s estimated position. The wind (W.S.W.) was freshening and rain squalls obscured visibility, state of the sea was moderate/rough and the general conditions were gradually worsening. "Velia"'s radar scan showed no trace of "Hildina" which was estimated to be approximately 8-9 miles distant at this time. After 15 minutes steaming a mark was visible on the scan dead ahead at about 4 miles and shortly afterwards one of the crew reported sighting a ship's boat on port bow. "Velia" steamed to the scene and next sighted a Carley float with a number of men aboard lying dead ahead. There was no sign of "Hildina". Nine men were taken from the float and then 1 man who was clinging to an overturned small boat nearby. One of the survivors told Skipper Pennington that "Hildina"'s Skipper and W.T.O. had gone down with the ship, but that 1 man was in vicinity hanging on to a lifebuoy. Later when cruising round this man was sighted but when alongside the "Velia" he slipped through the buoy and was lost. The "Monimia" and "Margaret Wicks" had arrived on the scene and shortly afterwards, owing to the necessity for prompt medical attention, course was set for Stornoway at about 1030 hours. Medical advice was obtained from Wick Radio but despite the efforts of the crew 1 man died on passage, but another man who was in a bad way recovered after prolonged treatment. The survivors were clothed and fed, and ultimately landed at Stornoway at 0300 hours on the 2nd December. The weather had deteriorated badly by the time the survivors had been reached, the "Velia" was shipping water and the wind had increased to a full gale which continued throughout the passage to Stornoway. Skipper Pennington had nothing but praise for the kindly and generous treatment accorded the survivors by the British Sailors' Society at Stornoway, who also conducted a short service onboard "Velia" for those lost in the disaster.

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YORKSHIRE POST

- 5 DEC 1953

Radio operator from Hull was 'real hero'

Hildina survivors' tribute

From our Blackpool correspondent

"The wireless operator was the real hero," said survivors of the Fleetwood trawler Hildina when they arrived at Blackpool airport yesterday on their way home from Stornoway.

The operator, Mr. R. M. Robertson, of James Rickett Avenue, Hull, is one of the five members of the crew missing after the Hildina sank in a gale 100 miles north of Scotland on Tuesday. The remainder of the crew were rescued and taken to Stornoway by another Fleetwood trawler, the Vella.

Robertson stuck to his post and got his message through," said the mate, Mr. J. Moran, of Bramley Avenue, Fleetwood, when he described the sinking.

Took a heavy sea

"I was on deck when the Hildina took a heavy sea and slipped right over." The list continued to increase, so we released a float and slid down the side of the ship. Then a heavy sea turned the float over.

He added that they could not see the Vella, but it seemed an "act of God" that she was near.

The survivors' flight home had been delayed at Stanraer by bad visibility. As their two planes landed at Blackpool yesterday relatives and friends dashed forward to greet them.

'He had everything to live for'

In an editorial comment yesterday, the Church Times stated: "The skipper stayed in his ship and went down with her. So did four other men, including the young radio operator, Robert Macdonald Robertson. He was married. His first child had just been born. He had everything to live for. But he went quietly on with his job, tapping out the vital distress signals until there was no chance of saving his own life. As a result of his steadfastness, nine survivors were found by another vessel and rescued from the water."

*Mr Fairbairn
Mr Hazelgrove
Mr Slea*

*his brother
5125*

*box etc. see the
works papers.
H. 8/12*

Mr Lawrence

M. 608/51

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G.B. 9516

Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries

WHITEHALL PLACE
LONDON, S.W.1

19th December, 1953

Dear Shea,

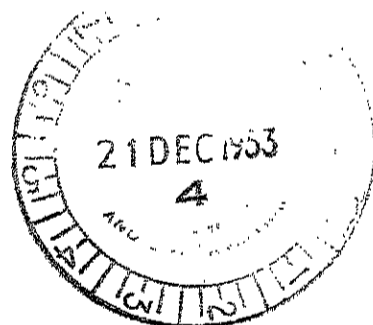
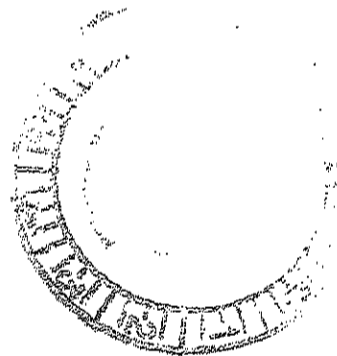
You may have seen reports in the press about the loss of the Motor Trawler "Hildina" which foundered suddenly whilst fishing off Sule Skerry on 1st December, with a loss of six lives including that of the skipper.

The name of the Skipper of the Motor Trawler "Velia" who effected the rescue of the remaining members of the crew has been put forward for a possible award; there is little doubt that but for his prompt action and subsequent endeavours in the face of high seas and gale force winds, all hands would have been lost. We feel that the excellent qualities displayed by Skipper Pennington call for recognition and I am sending along a report on the incident for the views of your Professional Officer as to what form this should take.

Yours sincerely,

A. H. Taylor

H.N. Taylor.



Mr Shea, Esq., M.B.E.,
Ministry of Transport and Civil Aviation,
Berkeley Square House,
London, W.1

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CIVIL AVIATION, AND

LETTER
31 DEC 1953
SENT

M(C) 16/1/084
9516

31st December, 1953

Dear Mr. Taylor,

Mr Shea has asked me to thank you for your letter of 19th December, 1953, with enclosure, regarding the loss of Motor Trawler "Hildina".

This matter is receiving attention and a letter will be sent to you as soon as possible.

Yours sincerely,

MARY WOOLLEY

MARY WOOLLEY

Handwritten initials

H.N. Taylor, Esq.,
Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries,
Whitehall Place,
London,
S.W.1.

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Daily Telegraph & Morning Post

Friday Jan 1, 1954

SHIP SURVIVOR WAITS 31 DAYS FOR TEETH

QUERY ON COST

DAILY TELEGRAPH REPORTER.
Thirty-one days ago, while struggling in the Atlantic when the Fleetwood trawler *Hilda*, 296 tons, sank with the loss of six lives, a survivor, Ernest Sumner, 41, of Mersey Road, Fleetwood, lost his false teeth. He is still without replacements. Sumner was the trawler's boatswain. He applied for new dentures a few days after his rescue.

His dentist, Mr. Rupert Swindells, forwarded the request to the Eastbourne headquarters of the Dental Estimates Board. With it he sent a covering letter from the ship's owners, explaining how the teeth were lost.

Mr. Swindells had an acknowledgment a fortnight later. Up to last night he had heard nothing further.

"STATEMENT REQUIRED"
But Sumner received a letter yesterday from the Lancashire Executive Council of the National Health Service. It said that the council had been told by the Dental Estimates Board of the application, and added:

"In accordance with the National Health Service (General Dental Services) Regulations 1948, you are asked to submit to the council, in writing, a statement setting out the circumstances which have necessitated the replacement in order that the council may decide whether or not the cost of such replacement should be borne by public funds.

"It is essential that the statement should reach this office within 10 days."

Sumner was given an opportunity of giving evidence to the council if he wished. His comment last night was:

"I have never heard of anything so ridiculous. I have told once how it all happened and how they want to know again.

"We not only lost our teeth but all our belongings. We had to fight for our lives, never mind about keeping our false teeth in our mouths."

Mr. Swindells, who is awaiting authority to make the teeth, said: "I explained the full circumstances and sent on the firm's letter. I am awaiting authority to make sets for another survivor from the same ship."

Inquiry Likely

A Ministry of Health spokesman said last night that the case appeared to be one into which the Ministry would inquire, to find out why the delay occurred.

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