

## THE PRINSENDAM STORY

(CG Logo) The radiomen of COMMSTA SAN FRANCISCO were going through their normal routine, when at 1:00 am (on Saturday the 4th of October 1988, the radio static was broken with the distress call of the MS PRINSENDAM, stating that her engine room was on fire, that the engine room had been flooded with carbon dioxide and that there were 329 passengers and 190 crew on board. This distress call was to set the stage for the most miraculous air/sea rescue of modern time.

(Prin slide) The MS PRINSENDAM was a 427 foot luxury liner worth approximately 50 million dollars.

(Prin vital stats) She had a 62 foot breadth, 19 foot draft, a gross register of 9,000 tons, and a cruising speed of 19 knots. Her hull was stabilizer equipped and she contained a swimming<sup>pool</sup> restaurant, three bars, a cinema, shopping center and 209 staterooms. The PRINSENDAM's personnel complement, at the time, consisted of 164 Indonesian crew members, 26 Dutch officers and 329 passengers, for a total of 519.

(Prin cruise chart) Owned by the Holland America Lines of the Netherlands, she was on an extensive cruise from Vancouver, B.C. up the Inside Passage of Southeast Alaska to Ketchikan and Glacier Bay. From there the PRINSENDAM was to have traveled to Japan, China and the Republic of Singapore.

(Prin position) The position of the PRINSENDAM's distress was 57-38 degrees North and 140-25 degrees West, which, when triangulated, placed her approximately 429 miles East of Kodiak, 330 miles Southeast of Valdez, 129 miles South of Yakutat and 195 miles West of Sitka. With the initial distress call received at 1:08 am, NORPAC-SARCOORD in Juneau, Alaska was alerted as SMC and began to execute the case. Within 40 minutes the following units were activated and responding:

(CGC Boutwell) The CGC BOUTWELL departed from Juneau where she was moored for participation in the city's centennial celebration.

(CGC WOODRUSH) departed from Sitka, enroute the scene, the:

(CGC MELLON) CGC MELLON was diverted to the scene as she was underway enroute Alaska for a fisheries patrol.

(HH-3F Helo) COGARD AIRSTA SITKA, which provided two H-3 helicopters, COGARD AIRSTA KODIAK, which provided two H-3 helicopters and:

(C-130) Two HC-130 fixed-wing aircraft, RCC VICTORIA, which provided two:

(CH-46 Helo) CG-46 helicopters and:

(Can. Buffalo) Two Canadian buffaloes, and one Argus Fixed wing aircraft, ELMENDORF AIR FORCE BASE, which provided one H-3 helicopter and one HC-130 refueler and RCC KODIAK, which provided additional communications support. Thirteen aircraft, rotary and fixed wing, three Coast Guard Cutters and three commercial vessels became involved by the mission's completion. One of the most important commercial vessels involved was the Tanker Vessel WILLIAMSBURGH.

(WILLIAMSBURGH) The WILLIAMSBURGH is a 1,000 foot super tanker owned by the Wilmington Trust Company of Wilmington, Delaware. At the time of the distress she was laden with Alaskan Crude Oil, obtained from the Port of Valdez. Enroute a port in Texas the WILLIAMSBURGH's position was relayed to NORPACARCOORD from RCC VICTORIA, B.C., as she was not on the initial SURPIC request. Approximately 5 hours away from the scene the WILLIAMSBURGH proceeded at 17 knots to serve as a staging platform from which to execute the rescue. Characteristics which made her ideally suited, under the circumstances, were her 65 foot draft, which allowed her to ride low in the water and consequently, increased her stability, a helo pad, room to house all 519 survivors, should the need arise and availability.

(Distant view of Prin) By 4:00 am, a Kodiak based C-130 was on scene, established OSC, and had commenced giving a continuous flow of information concerning the case. The engine room fire had spread forward and upward reaching the dining room by 5:12 am. With this spreading came the elimination of all power, water pressure and consequent firefighting capabilities.

(L/B's) Abandoning the PRINSENDAM in 6 lifeboats, 1 covered motor launch and 4 liferafts, with 18-30 passengers each, the crew and passengers executed a safe and orderly departure, commencing at 5:12 am. Within moments the tiny flotilla was launched into 5-10 foot seas, 10-15 knot winds and deteriorating weather conditions.

(L/B w/survivors) Remarkably, not one casualty or major injury was reported, though one covered motor launch and several liferafts got hung up in the ship's rigging. A 50 man firefighting crew remained on board the PRINSENDAM and continued fighting the fire with personnel and firefighting equipment lowered to her decks from a Coast Guard H-3 helicopter. They were to remain on board until 1:45 pm, at which time the CGC BOUTWELL arrived on scene. At that time a request for immediate removal was dispatched from the firefighting crew. by 4:14 pm, all had been removed to the safety of the ~~CGC BOUTWELL~~. WILLIAMSBURGH

(CH-46 w/flare) The weather on scene had deteriorated throughout the day to 25-35 foot seas, scattered showers and 15-20 knot winds.

(CH-46 w/L/B) With the onset of darkness transfer operations from the lifeboats and rafts were stepped up considerably. By this time there were 5-6 helicopters involved airlifting survivors to safety.

(CH-46 w/L/B) Hoisting operations progressed to the point of 8-12

survivors being taken aboard each helicopter, individually:

(CH-46 hoisting) before returning to the T/V WILLIAMSBURGH or CGC BOUTWELL.

(Hoisting) By 4:30 pm 1 lifeboat of survivors remained to be transferred.

(CH-46 hoisting)

(Sm boat & L/B) Additional transfer of survivors took place via small boat from the CGC BOUTWELL. Upon disembarking from the helicopters, on board the WILLIAMSBURGH or CGC BOUTWELL, survivors received immediate medical attention, blankets and food.

(Pax o/b Wills) By 6:16 pm all survivors were believed to be accounted for either on board the CGC BOUTWELL, T/V WILLIAMSBURGH or in the town of Sitka. At this time the M/V's PORTLAND and SOHIO INTREPID were released from the case and the T/V WILLIAMSBURGH proceeded enroute Valdez, to off load survivors.

(T/V WILLIAMSBURGH) The CGC BOUTWELL, meanwhile, remained on scene awaiting the arrival of CGC MELLON and further orders. A review of resources used during the case revealed two U.S. Air Force Pararescuemen unaccounted for. Known to have been lowered into a lifeboat containing 18-20 survivors at 3:45 pm, they could not be located on board the T/V WILLIAMSBURGH, CGC BOUTWELL or a Sitka, by 9:16 pm. The CGC BOUTWELL immediately returned to the scene, established datum and commenced an expanding square search pattern in the hopes of finding the missing lifeboat. Confirmation that one lifeboat was definitely unaccounted for came from the M/V SOHIO INTREPID in a message stating that the missing lifeboat was last seen when a U.S. Air Force helicopter was forced to make an emergency landing on her deck. During the excitement and worsening weather conditions the lifeboat was evidently overloaded. At 1:01 am, 5 October, the missing lifeboat was found with the two Pararescuemen and 18 survivors on board. All were in excellent condition, considering the circumstances, and taken on board for the 9 1/2 hour trip to Sitka.

(Boat pax) At 2:30 pm, 5 October the CGC BOUTWELL arrived in Crescent Harbor, Sitka, Alaska and shuttled survivors ashore on the M/V St. Nicholas.

(M/V St. Nick) Once ashore, survivors were taken by bus:

(Pax & bus) to the Sheffield house Hotel to await comparison of survivor manifests with the master manifest held by the Holland America Lines, and transport home.

(Pax disembarking) The T/V WILLIAMSBURGH, meanwhile, arrived in Valdez at 6:10 pm, 5 October, disembarked her survivors, compared manifests and prepared to depart for a port in Texas. A final manifest of survivors indicated that 62 were airlifted to Sitka

during the case, 87 were taken on board the CGC BOUTWELL and 370 were taken on board the T/V WILLIAMSBURGH; a total of 519.

(CG/AF/CAN Acft at Yakutat) A staging area was set up at Yakutat for logistic, medical and aircraft support. With aircraft remaining on scene to the maximum many survivors were brought back to Yakutat at the duration of each sortie for further transport to Sitka.

(Pax off load at Yak) Once in Sitka, the survivors were to await the conclusion of the mission before going home.

(CGC MELLON) With the rescue of all survivors attention was turned to the "salvage" end of the operation. During the 5th of October the CGC's MELLON and WOODRUSH remained on scene checking out, and marking or sinking all lifeboats and rafts deployed during the mission, to ensure accountability.

(Prin w/smoke) On 6 October the PRINSENDAM was<sup>a</sup> burning hulk drifting in a Northwesterly direction at approximately 2 knots. The CGC MELLON and an H-3 helicopter remained nearby awaiting the arrival of the ocean-going tug COMMODORE STRAITS, from Vancouver, B.C. The COMMODORE STRAITS was to tow the PRINSENDAM off the shore of Alaska a distance of 50 miles or more, at the request of the U.S. Coast Guard, while enroute the Port of Portland, Oregon.

(Prin mid stage) At 1:30 pm, 6 October heavy smoke poured from the PRINSENDAM, due to a simultaneous ignition of 15 rolls of carpeting and a liferaft, stored on her upper deck. By 5:30 pm the smoke had subsided and the COMMODORE STRAITS had arrived on scene.

(Prin deck plans) The PRINSENDAM's deck plan consisted of a B-Deck, which was indicated by the lowest row of port holes, an A-Deck, Main deck, promenade Deck, Bridge Deck and a Sun Deck.

(Prin stbd. roll)

(prin being towed) At 11:15 am on 7 October a 9 man firefighting assessment and rigging team was put on board the PRINSENDAM to rig her for towing and assess the damage. The PRINSENDAM was taken under tow at 2:30 pm.

(Prin port damage) The port side promenade Deck was smoking at three lifeboat stations with fire below.

(Prin port damage) The upper cabins were not burned as extensively as the starboard side, but were in danger. The Bridge Deck was burning, significantly.

(Prin port damage) Various "hot spots" could be seen as could the direction the fire was spreading, due to the port holes bursting as the fire progressed. The PRINSENDAM was now veering slightly, as she was being towed by her anchor chain. Speed of advance of the COMMODORE STRAITS was 5-6 knots, at this time.

(Forepart of the Prin) The forepart of the PRINSENDAM was burned out extensively on the bridge Deck.

(Bridge) By the 9th of October, the bridge area had been burned to the point of total collapse in certain areas.

(Prin stbd damage) Damage to the PRINSENDAM was extensive by this time as the fire had ravaged most of the ship during the previous three days. The starboard side revealed smoke coming from the main stairway and fan room under the bridge,

(Prin stbd damage) with most upper decks buckled and interior stanchions on the Promenade Deck buckling up to 9 inches.

(Prin stbd damage) The fire had gutted the bridge deck and cabins on the Promenade Deck, starboard side. Extensive heat caused exterior paint to blister and, in some cases, catch on fire.

(Prin stbd side) She was listing approximately 15 degrees to starboard by the 7th of October.

(Prin stern damage) The Bridge Deck, Promenade Deck and Main Deck aft were completely burned out by the 7th of October.

(Prin stern damage)

(Towing and veering) By 10:30 am, 10 October the PRINSENDAM could no longer be towed straight ahead. She was veering extensively, while being towed, reducing the speed of advance of the COMMODORE STRAITS to 2-3 knots.

(Bow down) The PRINSENDAM was listing 30-35 degrees to starboard and was down by the bow on the morning of 10 October. Port holes on the B and A Decks were all broken out by the fire and water as flowing in and out at will. Periodically, the water would reach the main Deck and enter the interior of the ship by this means.

(35 degree roll) She was rolling from 20 degrees port to 35 degrees starboard, sustaining an 11 second period of roll on her starboard side.

(Final Roll) By first light on 11 October, the PRINSENDAM was listing 40-45 degrees to starboard and reducing the speed of advance of the COMMODORE STRAITS to 1-2 knots.

At 8:30 am, the PRINSENDAM rolled on her starboard side and sank at 8:33 am, in 1473 fathoms of water.