

NEWS

Fight for their lives at sea



The fishermen's boat J69 and three other crew members are brought back into St Catherine's yesterday
Picture: JON GUEGAN (02018030)

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Martin called the Coastguard and the St Helier RNLI lifeboat was launched 15 minutes later.

Lifeboats from Alderney and Carteret were also scrambled, as were helicopters from France and the UK.

The Channel Islands Air Search plane also crash-landed on Jersey's north coast after suffering a double-engine failure during the search.

But around 11 pm when the search had moved north of the Ecréhous Steve waded back to shore and walked across to the main reef, where he shouted out his brother's name.

He told Martin that Mr Bonhomme was OK but was still sheltering under the dinghy.

The group contacted the Coastguard, and the UK's search and rescue helicopter, which was on its way back to Jersey Airport to refuel, was quickly scrambled to airlift Mr Bonhomme out of the water.

It also plucked Steve from the reef and the pair were taken back to Jersey before being transferred to hospital and treated for hypothermia.

Mr Viney was discharged shortly after but Mr Bonhomme was kept in and remained under observation in

the Hospital's intensive care unit yesterday.

He remained in a stable condition in the unit this morning.

Martin, who remained at the reef overnight with the other two party members, has thanked all of the emergency services involved in the search.

'All of the rescue services were tremendous and we are forever in their debt,' he said.

'It was an extremely anxious few hours but we received a lot of support from the fishing community throughout and we cannot thank everybody enough.'

'Great relief when they were confirmed safe'

By Philip Jordan

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JUST as the majority of Islanders were preparing themselves for a cosy night in away from the storm, Jonathan Cornic and his six RNLI crew members found themselves thrust into the very thick of it.

Mr Cornic, who is the only full-time RNLI staff member in Jersey, received an alarm that two fishermen had disappeared just as the wind speeds started to increase.

His team launched from St Helier at 6.30 pm and set off for the Ecréhous, where the two men had last been seen in a dinghy.

'The weather conditions made it incredibly hard but the location of where they had last been seen also made it extremely difficult,' he said.

'The heavy rain meant that visibility was down to between 50 and 100 yards and it was also very rough and windy.'

'We did not know whether they were still on their dinghy, clinging on to a rock or drifting away to sea and that meant our search area was a lot bigger.'

'Without any information you cannot concentrate the search on one area and we were actually 55 minutes from the north of the Ecréhous when we eventually



Jonathan Cornic

heard that that they had been found.'

He added: 'It was incredibly lucky as there was no real communication throughout but you would be surprised how quickly the time goes in those situations.'

'There is so much going on and it is extremely intense and it did not feel anywhere near seven hours when we finally got back to St Helier.'

'You just get on with the job and it really was such a great relief when they were confirmed safe.'

Crashed aircraft just made it to land after engine failures

THE search and rescue plane which crashed onto the north coast narrowly avoided plunging into the sea after suffering a double-engine failure, it has emerged.

As further details of Sunday night's operation continue to emerge, Jersey Coastguard's harbourmaster, Barry Goldman, said the aircraft just made it to the Island and could well have crashed into the sea.

Diverted

He told the JEP that the Channel Islands Air Search plane suffered a single engine failure while en-route to the Ecréhous from Guernsey before another engine went down as it diverted to Jersey.

Mr Goldman, who was coordinating the rescue operation at the time and was in contact with the plane, said the pilot had no option but to crash land on to the headland in complete darkness.

By Philip Jordan

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The plane, which had five crew on board, ditched onto a slope behind the Priory Inn at Devil's Hole and hit a tree just yards from a steep drop towards the coastline.

Mr Goldman praised the pilot for his actions and said it was remarkable that all five members came away unhurt.

'The plane was just about to start its search at the Ecréhous when it suffered a single engine failure and the crew quickly decided to try and land at Jersey Airport,' he said.

'On its way, it then had a second engine failure and the pilot had to crash land the aircraft instantly.'

'We were listening to it the whole way and the pilot had very little time to make a decision on where to try to land.'

Mr Goldman added that losing the plane could have been a significant factor in the rescue operation.

He said that it initially left him without an aircraft with infrared capability, which can locate individuals using body heat.

The harbourmaster said the plane's infrared may have found the pair, who sheltered under their upturned dinghy for over four hours before one of them managed to wade to shore.

'After losing the search plane we asked for support from France, who launched a navy helicopter,' he said.

'It identified that nobody was in the moored fishing boat and it was then tasked with looking around the Ecréhous.'

'It could not see anyone but it did not have the infrared capability, which may well have been a significant factor.'

'Due to the wind direction and tidal streams we moved the search north of the reef shortly afterwards but the air search plane may have been able to identify the pair earlier had it been available to us.'



Members of the public taking pictures of the crashed Channel Islands Air Search plane yesterday
Picture: MATTHEW HOTTON (02018423)

Airsearch without plane for some time

THE Channel Islands will be without an air search aircraft for the foreseeable future following the crash landing of the Lions' Pride on Sunday evening.

The modified plane, which is kitted out with hundreds of thousands of pounds worth of specialist equipment used to locate stranded sailors or vessels, ditched on a sloping headland in St Mary in strong winds and heavy rain.

The aircraft came to rest against a tree a short way above the devil statue at Devil's Hole, but all five crew members were able to walk away and into the Priory pub.

Colin Ferbrache, the chief officer for the CIAS, which is based in Guernsey, said that the plane was not a write-off, but that it could not simply be replaced with another aircraft.

By Toby Chiang

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'It's difficult to assess at the moment,' he said. 'I don't think you could say it is a write-off yet as there are parts of the plane that are undamaged. I don't think it's a hopeless case, but there are a number of parts that are damaged that will have to be replaced.'

'It really comes down to the insurers as to whether the plane gets repaired or not.'

'But we've only got one aircraft and we're unique with the equipment on board and it's not as if we can borrow another one from someone else.'

The CIAS service runs 365 days a year and is wholly funded by charitable donations. It costs

£90,000 per year to run the organisation and Mr Ferbrache explained that it would cost millions to replace the plane.

He added that the aircraft could be dismantled in St Mary in order for it to be moved from the headland.

The Aircraft Accident Investigation Branch was due to arrive in the Island yesterday afternoon to begin their investigation at the crash site and later speak to the pilot and crew who had returned to Guernsey.

Mr Ferbrache explained that the AAIB's investigation could be carried out within a few days. He added: 'They will try to find reasons why the aircraft lost power. They are very experienced in this sort of thing and will deal with it pretty promptly.'

'It's quite a difficult site to get the plane out of and it looks like it might have to be dismantled there, so I think it will be quite difficult really.'

After escaping unharmed the five crew members walked into the Priory pub where staff brought them water, tea and a sweet snack.

Rowan Dickman (18), who has worked at the pub for four months, said the crew looked shaken.

'They came into the restaurant and were all shaken up,' she said. 'They said they had crashed and walked to the closest place they could find.'

'We gave them water, made them cups of tea and gave them something sweet as well. I didn't really speak to them much as I didn't want to get in the way. They were shocked.'