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7th March 2008 Report

David Mearns - Search Director, The Finding Sydney Foundation

There is only one photo to go with our blogs today because there is only one subject that has dominated our day. The weather.

Despite the fact that she was downgraded early in the day, Ophelia has continued to shadow the Geosounder and prevent us from recommencing the search. After Geosounder's third successive course change to avoid the dangerous southern quadrants of the storm, whereupon Ophelia also changed course to cover our tracks, I joked with the Master, Blair Cliffe, that Ophelia well and truly had his number.

It appeared that Blair had finally out foxed Ophelia in his last turn to the West back towards the search box because the wind suddenly dropped from 28 knots to about 10 knots and the sea began to lie down. Unfortunately Ophelia had one last sting in her tail because two hours later we were being buffeted by 38 knot winds with gusts to 45 knots.

At times it felt like we were playing one big game of chess with Ophelia. On our side we had a lot of help from the Bureau of Meteorology (Bruce Buckley and Brad Centos) and the RAN Duty Forecaster who supplied up to date forecast information throughout the day. The sea is still too rough to allow a safe launch of the SM30 sonar but everyone is standing by and anxious to get it back in the water as soon as Ophelia lets us.



Above Photograph - Cyclone Ophelia

John Perryman - Senior Navy Historian (Observer)

Some years ago I wrote an article for the Sea Power Centre – Australia newsletter concerning naval ingenuity. It began:

Throughout history, seafarers have had to consistently use their ingenuity to improvise, adapt and overcome in the face of adversity. The very nature of ships is such that when they sail and the 'umbilical cord' connecting them to shore infrastructure is cut, they become dependant upon their own provisions and resources. Notwithstanding the technological advantages enjoyed today by mariners the world over, this truism remains.

Today I was reminded of this opening paragraph as I observed the Williamson technicians working tirelessly to restore their SM30 towed array to full operational condition. In a vessel being continually tossed around by a heavy swell, and without the luxury of stable and fully equipped shore based workshops, they were certainly up against it. Remarkably the faults were traced one by one and rectified and I was pleased to see that the old adage – improvise, adapt and overcome still rings true.

To quote the famous author Nicholas Monsarrat, the 'cruel sea' now remains our only real obstacle before we can continue our search for Sydney and Kormoran.

For those interested in reading the original article concerning Naval Ingenuity please visit the following web link:

http://www.navy.gov.au/spc/semaphore/issue18_2005.html

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