



The Fedra at the moment of impact
— she later broke in two

MV Fedra Disaster

behind the scenes

This month we take a peek behind a totally different scene, a real life scenario, one of danger and threat to life, a real disaster partly caused by mother nature. Of course we refer to the recent tanker accident where the MV Fedra dragged its anchors and crashed into Europa Point.

This article solely covers the evening of the event — and all the effort put in by the civilian teams present through that night — to bring to the foreground some of the people who were involved in the rescue of the Fedra's crew.

These people put in their all without question, and remained in the background, as for them just being able to make something possible was enough reward. We thought it only fair they too should be mentioned to make the general public aware of what a big part these background people play. In so many different scenarios, and various situations, you will always find them, giving everything of themselves with very little exposure — they rarely get the chance to take a bow at curtains down.

Having heard from a good source about Elias Tapiero's involvement, I felt it was a story worth highlighting. After managing to contact Elias at Steelmac, he very kindly agreed to meet to give us the opportunity to be lead through this, his very personal experience, of that dreadful stormy windy night in October.

But contrary to what I set out to do — to tell Elias's story — things turned out slightly differently as he would not allow me to mention him without mentioning all the other civilians who were involved.

"We were a team and we all worked together," he said.

Impressed by this man's modesty I continued the interview. So this is what happened and how it all went, seen through Elias's eyes.

It was Friday evening and therefore the Jewish day of Shabbat. Being Jewish Elias was at home with all telephone connections switched off. Titan Salvage the company which co-ordinated the operation therefore had to call Richard Martin from Steelmac, who personally went to Elias's house to tell him of the disaster at hand.

Elias immediately set about arranging for a special crane to be brought to Gibraltar, which was essential to the rescue of the crew.

To achieve this on a Friday evening and at such short notice was not the easiest of tasks, yet he managed to get hold of the owner of the Spanish company Euro Gruas, which he also feels needs to be given a big mention.

Jose Antonio Perez owner of Euro Gruas, without any hesitation or even questioning the form of payment, responded positively and immediately to Elias's plea of help.

Having arranged the crane he then had to make other essential arrangements. There had to be a police escort ready to accompany the crane, he had to get the go ahead from the Chief Minister to bring the crane into Gibraltar and to have the escort waiting for it — a 160 ton crane can hardly drive through Gibraltar streets on it's own, can it now.

Everything was done under a lot of pressure and time was of an essence. The fact this special crane arrived in Gibraltar only one hour after Elias started to get everything on the road, is really not far from a record.

So with the crane in Gibraltar things could get underway, but due to the wind being too strong at this point, frustratingly everything had to be delayed until around 7pm when the operation began.

Visibility was near to zero, and the task of lowering the special metal cages down to the ship was a real challenge. The harsh wind together with the powerful spray of water was only part of the problem, the other was the sand

and the many stones being carried around by the storm. Conditions not many of the public can imagine, but conditions that were endured by the rescue workers.

Elias said we need to thank one person (who we don't know the name of), who managed to get 50 goggles in the early hours of the morning to aid the rescuers' visibility. This made things so much easier and improved everyone's vision. Elias emphasised "You cannot imagine what a difference these goggles made to us."

Proof once again, that even the smaller and simpler actions are crucial.

The Spanish rescue helicopter on the scene had to make an emergency landing, leaving their scuba diver behind on the ship. He was brought up in one of the cages from the crane and said conditions on the ship were not the best — all onboard were very much at their limits and they needed to hurry with the rescue.

One can envisage the scenario, surrounded by these terrible weather conditions and now the immense pressure of having to ensure everyone on this ship would come out of this unharmed. The tension must have been felt everywhere.

But as we already know, all the crew were saved and all are unharmed. A total of 27 people were lifted from the ship in the steel cages, and apart from obviously being in shock and very shaken and cold, it was a miracle everyone was okay. Very much a miracle made possible by a team of very brave and selfless people.

Steelmac's team, Elias together with Richard Martin and Juan Carlos Robba, were there throughout the entire night and did not go home and rest until the last of the people in danger



The Steelmac team, Elias, Richard and Juan Carlos

were saved, things were finally in control and they were not needed anymore.

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Elias also told me, how much it impressed him to see both the Chief Minister Peter Caruana and Minister Joe Holliday personally at the scene. He said not only were they both there throughout the night, but they were outside, not under shelter, therefore getting cold and wet just like everyone else — this must have been encouraging for all the teams.

So as all ends well with the rescue side of this operation, what remains is for us all to give a well deserved standing ovation to these so very brave men who volunteered in this operation.

The civilian rescue teams were from the companies Titan Salvage, Steelmac and Euro Gruas. ■



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