

"VERNICOS GEORGIOS"

GIORGIOS VENTOURIS of Master  
Botsari 11  
PIRAEUS  
Greece

S T A T E S :

I have a Greek Foreign Going Master's Certificate dated 1979. I have 11 years sea service of which 1 year I have been in command of tugs. I am 30 years of age.

I joined the "VERNICOS GEORGIOS" on October 13 1981 at Bangor, Wales, as Master.

My orders were to tow the "VERNICOS BARBARA" and the "VERNICOS ALEXIS" to a lay-up berth or port to be named but not further South than the Scilly Islands.

I had not been on the "VERNICOS GEORGIOS" before. Before sailing I received all necessary S.O.L.A.S. '74 documents, e.g. charts, Radio Telephone list of signal stations, Nautical tables, Davies tables and all other requirements.

I have not got the bridge log book, it is still on board the "VERNICOS GEORGIOS".

On sailing from Bangor the "VERNICOS GEORGIOS"'s draft was approximately forward 9 feet and aft 11 feet. We had no cargo on board the "VERNICOS GEORGIOS" nor was there any on



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either the "ALEXIS" or the "BARBARA" but on the  
"GEORGOS"'s deck we had about 12 large drums of oil  
lashed down with ropes.

The "structure" of all three vessels was good. The  
"GEORGOS" had 1 x 1 ton anchor on her starboard bow  
with 5 shackles of chain and a spare anchor port side  
forward on which there was no chain but on which we  
bent polypropelene rope when it was needed. The  
Windlass was in good working order.

The Bridge gear consisted of -

- a McGregor Compass in the wheelhouse with  
Ozimuth mirror and no periscope to Monkey  
Island but with cell round the wheelhouse  
windows and we had no problems taking bearings;
- a Cook sextant;
- a Decca Radar;
- 1 x Seafarer E.S.D.;
- 1 x Sea range log;
- VHF "Sea Voice"; and
- 400 watt Radio Telephone transceiver by ITT.

The "GEORGOS" had hydraulic steering gear which was  
in good working condition.

On October 16 1981 "VERNICOS GEORGOS" towing "VERNICOS  
ALEXIS" and "VERNICOS BARBARA" sailed from Bangor in  
the early afternoon, heading North up the Menai Straits  
to round Angelsy by the North.



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After clearing the Straits the tow was organised as follows:-

"GEORGIOS" - "ALEXIS" : a wire strop from "GEORGIOS"'s hook was shackled to about 200 metres of nylon which was shackled to a 4/5 metre bridle on "ALEXIS".

"ALEXIS" - "BARBARA"<sup>N</sup> : a wire strop from bitts on the tow deck were shackled to about 200 metres of nylon which was shackled to a bridle on the "BARBARA".

The weather was good with light North Westerly winds and we were towing well at about 6 to 7 knots.

On Saturday, October 17 the flotilla was proceeding South down the St George's Channel and we were still awaiting orders as to what our destination was to be.

At about 0430 the Chief Engineer asked me to reduce to "slow ahead" because he had an engine problem. He requested me to find a place to anchor to enable him to make repairs. I consulted the tide tables and chart and decided to anchor in St Bride's Bay, West of Solva.

Anglesey Radio gave me a weather forecast in the morning, the winds being North Easterly, force 3 to 4 and good weather, remaining calm for the next 24 hours.



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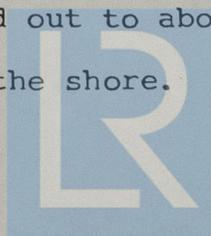
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Before anchoring we took the "VERNICOS ALEXIS" portside alongside on our starboard side in order to make her fast. We flaked down her tow rope on the "GEORGIOS"'s deck although there was about 2 metres hanging down over "GEORGIOS"'s port quarter and in the sea. I then let go the starboard anchor and paid out  $4\frac{1}{2}$  shackles and brought up in a position of approximately latitude  $51^{\circ}52'05''N$  and longitude  $5^{\circ}13'05''W$ , which we established by radar. N.B. This is the position in which the anchor was dropped. The time was about 1700.

The Chief Engineer said he wanted time for the main engine to cool. I told him I wanted the repairs done as soon as possible. In the event the repairs were only completed on October 18 at about 1430. The seas remained clam and the weather was good.

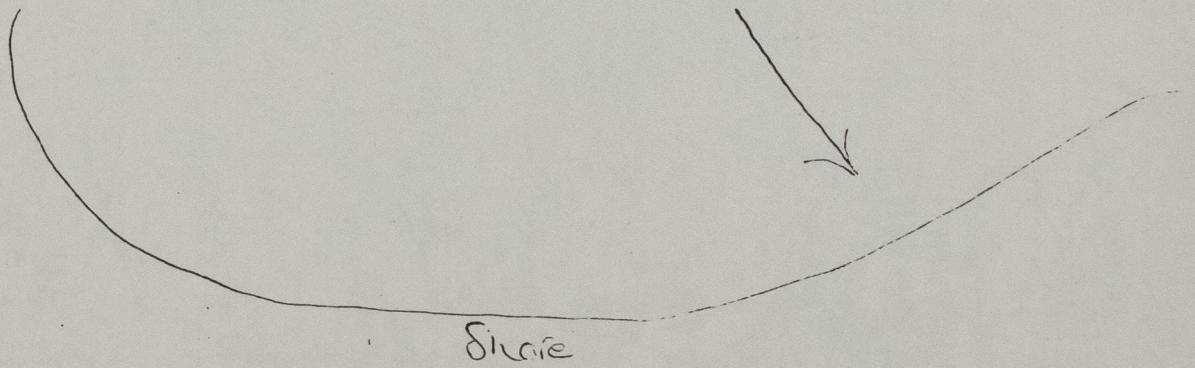
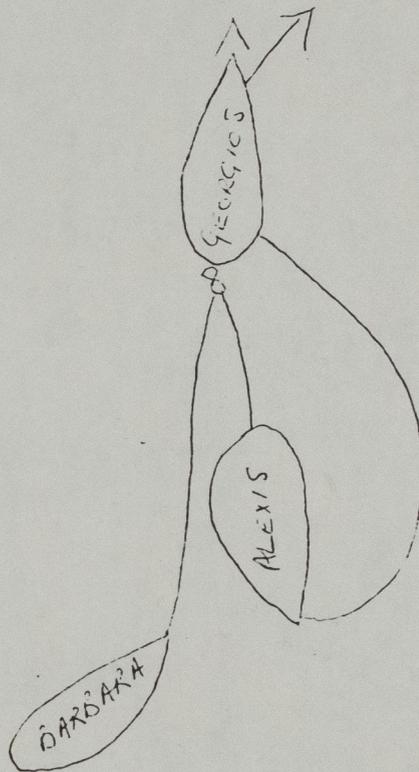
The main engine was started and put on standby and at about 1515 we commenced weighing the starboard anchor at which time the wind started to increase from the South West. This caused the "BARBARA" to drift towards the shore and after the "GEORGIOS"'s anchor was aweigh the "BARBARA"'s towline now drifted under the "GEORGIOS" and "ALEXIS" (the latter tug still being alongside the "GEORGIOS").

The wind continued to increase. I quickly let go "ALEXIS" and we tried short engine movements ahead and astern to clear the towline but the propeller was jammed. I immediately ordered the starboard anchor to be dropped again and we paid out to about  $3\frac{1}{2}$  shackles as "GEORGIOS" drifted towards the shore. (See sketch).



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As the sketch shows, by now both "ALEXIA" and "BARBARA" were shorewards of "GEORGIOS" and their towlines were taut. We now let go the spare port anchor on which we had bent the polypropelene line and we paid out about 50 metres of this.

It was approximately 1630 and the situation was very dangerous. I called via Celtic Radio for a Diver and spoke to a tug at Milford Haven called "AVONGARTH" on Channel 16 and asked for immediate help. He said he would leave at once.

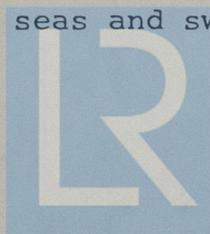
Three hours later when the tug had not arrived I again called it up and was told they were still awaiting their Owners' instructions.

At 2300 the tug said they were just leaving Milford Haven and would arrive at St Brides at 0145 on Monday morning.

In the meantime Celtic Radio told me that the Diver would come from Solva but he never came either.

The Coastguard sent a lifeboat at about 2200 and at about 2245 it took off three crew members. At this time "ALEXIA" and "BARBARA" were aground and although these two tugs had anchors, these were not let go as there was no time.

The weather was now very bad. A gale was blowing from the South West with steep seas and swell rolling into the bay.



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At approximately 0015 on Monday, October 19 the "GORGOS" grounded on the leeshore. By now it was impossible to stay on board the vessel and we, the remaining crew of 5, were taken off by helicopter it now being too rough for the lifeboat.

I re-visited the scene on October 20 and 21 and as the photographs show, all three tugs are totally lost.

G VENTOURIS

Milford Haven

October 21 1981



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