

## **A NEAR DISASTER**

In April 1985 I sailed single ship to Portsmouth to relieve HMCS Iroquois in STANAVFORLANT. With a fuel stop in the Azores my SOA was a fast sixteen knots with the course shaped just south enough to be ahead of the annual iceberg migration line for that time of year.

The pre-sail weather brief revealed that a strong westerly wind has been blowing for about a week hence I expected following seas all the way across the pond. Upon rounding Sable Island I estimated the sea running at close to fifteen knots. Having briefed all concerned that we can expect sloppy steering and an uncomfortable ride, the ship settled down to a light routine. My one fear was that should this wind persist, sea speed will increase to match our SOA resulting in the rudders in still water, hence loss of steering. As will be seen later, this is exactly what happened.

I was a firm believer in the practice of flying the embarked Sea King as near daily as possible, lest things will start going wrong. Now to what happened next. (three months later the bird flew off to Shearwater still CAT ONE)

The bird was approaching Charlie time when the weather took a drastic turn for the worst. The wind veered to the South at 70 knots gusting to 80; sea state increased to five and visibility dropped to zero.

With the need for a flying course on the nose, recovery would be in a high beam sea with rolls of 30 degrees or more. I spoke directly to the pilot, a young Captain whose name sadly escapes me, offering him HIFR while I ran South seeking warmer air and better visibility. He said: "Sir if I can HIFR I can land". I wound the ship up to full power approaching 30 knots to give him a wide wake to find the ship and a green light to land. At this speed landing conditions were 30 plus degrees of roll and a relative wind speed of 100 knots and gusting. With his superb flying skills and great work by the LSO, the landing was quick and uneventful.

Once the bird was folded, fuelled and tucked in the barn I resumed our easterly course at 16 knots. This is when the expected happened. Sea speed increased to 16 knots, I took a greenie on the starboard quarter and rolled good old Skeena 57 degrees to port. I believe this record still stands. Fortunately by this time there was no one on the upper decks.

To get out of the roll full speed astern was ordered to get immediate wash across the rudders. This worked and the ship returned to even keel like the good girl she was.

At full heel the motor cutter on the port side davits was under water. Damage was limited to the loss of a few guardrail stanchions, the fuelling hoses secured under the overhang and one lifeboat cannister.

