

THE RESCUE

At 17.30 hours on Saturday 20 June 2002, a call comes into the Rescue Service Call Centre (Fish Comm), a boat in trouble, about two kilometres south west of the southern most point of Berant. Dani-girl's team is the duty team, so they scramble for their helicopter and head out. The location puts the boat about 30 minutes flight time away. On route, they get an update - the boat is sinking fast, one adult dead, another badly injured, and seven children on board. Tension in the chopper is high, as they race the setting sun to the boat.

Arriving on site, they report the situation - no boat visible, seven children clinging to some floats, no life vests, no signs of adults, failing light, and sharks moving in. The helicopter hovers low over the scene with all its flood lights on, the door gunner is shooting the sharks and the swimmer jumps into the water with harness rigs for the children, while Dani-girl lowers the winch. Soon the children all have harnesses on and the swimmer is attaching the children to the winch cable harness. The regulations call for no more than three children at a time. Suddenly, it's quiet - too quiet. The machine gun keeping the sharks at bay by killing those getting too close has stopped - it's jammed. Frantically, the gunner works on the gun, but the gun won't work - the firing mechanism won't open or move.

Releasing her harness from the safety straps, Dani-girl draws her combat knife as she takes the medic's combat knife and orders the gunner to take over the winch. Stepping to the doorway, she leaps out into the night, in the direction of the shark pack, shouting "For the people." She lands on the foremost shark, the impact kills it, she stabs a shark on either side and starts killing all the sharks near her. Reaching as far as she can and stabbing as hard as possible, she quickly kills several sharks by stabbing them in their brains. The pack is a large one, with over a hundred sharks in it. She continues to stab and kill sharks with the 400 mm knives. Even when a shark pulls her under the water, she manages to kill some swimming lower down and comes up under others, so she can kill more of them. The sharks are delayed by eating their dead, as she intended.

Knowing time is now extremely critical, the swimmer throws the regulations to the wind and attaches the four smallest children to the winch. Quickly, it's hauled up, the children unhooked, and the winch lowered again. The medic wraps the children in warm blankets as she leads them across the flight deck and straps them into seats. The swimmer has the three largest children harnessed to the winch, they're winched up, unhooked, and the medic takes care of them. All through this, the co-pilot is watching what's happening with Dani-girl, he sees her dragged under the water a few times - a clear indication a shark has attacked her. The winch is lowered to the swimmer, he hooks on. Turning himself until he's hanging upside down with a leg around the cable, he directs the pilot to move the helicopter over Dani-girl's location.

Once in position above Dani-girl, they lower him until he can reach out and grab her harness. Urgently, they raise the winch. The radio is filled with the sound of the swimmer crying, he can see she's lost both legs at the knees and her side is badly savaged, blood is pouring out of the wounds. After getting her into the helicopter, the medic, swimmer, and door gunner are like dervishes as they apply tourniquets and bandages to stop the bleeding. The pilot turns for

the coast and has the helicopter at maximum speed, as he heads for the nearest hospital.

Everyone on board the helicopter is crying, except Dani-girl. Reaching to the eldest child, a girl sitting near her, Dani-girl takes her hand and squeezes it, saying "I knew the price when I made the deal, seven for one's a bargain." To the medic, she says "Tell Gordie I love him. Forget the hospital, it's too late. Take me home." Sighing, she closes her eyes and stops breathing. At 18.25 hours, after trying resuscitation techniques, the medic declares her dead. The pilot cuts back on his speed and changes course, heading towards base now. Going on the radio, he informs command of the events. They agree - bring her home.

Later...

At 6.20 pm, dinner is finished and the people are chatting. A few minutes later, Gordie suddenly looks up, frowns, and swears. Very unusual behaviour for him. Excusing himself, he gets up and walks outside to the balcony overlooking View Port. Pulling a mobile phone from his pocket, he punches a number. While he waits for it to answer, his sister Isobelle walks out onto the balcony and stands beside him. The phone is answered, he says "Pete, please contact your pipers and arrange for them all to find somewhere high, near where they are and play 'Danny Boy' followed by 'The Last Post.' Call me back when you have it ready." Turning to his sister, with tears streaming down his face, he says "She's gone Issy, she's gone." Isobelle staggers back, she's never seen him this disturbed about anything. He turns and looks over the town, it's a lovely sight; he doesn't see it at all.

Not sure what's happening, but determined to keep a record (Isobelle is a chronic record keeper now days), she goes to her seat, gets her portable recorder from her handbag, and returns to the balcony. A minute or so after she does, Gordie gets a phone call, he acknowledges the call and hangs up. Sensing something important, she turns on the recorder and places it on a table nearby. A moment later, she can hear distant flutes and bagpipes playing the introduction to the song 'Danny Boy,' when it reaches the point for the vocalist to join in, Gordie starts singing "Oh, Dani-girl, the pipes, the pipes are calling, from glen to glen, and down the mountainside....." Putting her hands to her face in shock, she staggers back as she realises the meaning of his words and actions. Their favourite sister is dead, and he's singing her spirit home. Dropping into a chair beside the table, she sits there quietly crying, the tears pour down both their faces as he sings.

A small crowd of their closest friends and family have come to the balcony doorway, but none move or speak. They don't know why or what's going on, but they recognise the intense pain and sorrow present on the balcony. Some of the family realise the import of the changed words to the song, they leave with tears streaming down their faces. Somehow, the atmosphere of the balcony is spreading through the reception room, people fall quiet, the dance music stops, the only sounds are Gordie's pain filled voice singing with the distant pipers. The song ends, a short spell, and the pipes start again, with 'The Last Post.' Gordie stands there with his head bowed. It comes to an end, he turns and walks inside, the crowd makes way for him in silence.

Gordie is halfway across the room when his mobile phone rings. Answering, he listens and says "Thank you colonel, you may release her name. I'll be there early tomorrow morning. Please see that she and her things remain undisturbed until I arrive. Will you please repeat that information to this person?" He hands the phone to King Edward, who, on seeing his expression, walked across the room to meet him.

King Edward listens to the caller and says "Thank you colonel." Hanging up, he turns and

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walks to the microphone set up for the Master of Ceremonies, turning it on, he says "Excuse me, I'm sorry, but the ball will be ending early this year. I've just been informed Senior Lieutenant Danielle 'Dani-girl' Amiri died in the course of her duties with the Royal Rescue Service at 6.25 pm tonight. I, like so many of you here tonight, knew her well, and after hearing this news, am unable to continue with a party. These rooms will stay open until the advertised closing time, for those who wish to stay here. Please excuse me, I must go and give her family my condolences. Thank you."

The whole room is silent, many are openly crying. She was very well known and loved by all in both the towns of View Port and Carmel. Most soon leave for home.