



Inside
story
Ship
rams
rocks

AN OILFIELD rescue ship rams into rocks near Lerwick Harbour in fog last night.

The crew of 10 of the Seaboard Intrepid took to a damaged lifeboat and reached Lerwick three miles away. The captain was taken off the vessel by Lerwick lifeboat.

The engine-room was 5ft. deep in water when they abandoned ship, and a crewman said it was lucky no one was injured.

PAGE 12

Graduation
stories,
pictures
— PAGES
9, 10 and 11

Act fast,
Newton
demands

HEALTH Minister Mr Tony Newton last night called for fast and effective action in Cleveland to clear up the mess left by the child sex-abuse scandal.

PAGE 2

Travel
firm fail

AFTER the financial collapse of an Aberdeen "bucket shop" travel operator, angry creditors were told their air ticket advance payments had probably been spent on alcohol.

PAGE 13

On other pages:
Births, Marriages, Deaths 2
District news 3, 6
TV Guide 4
Andrew McKay 5
World news 6
Horoscopes 12
Cartoons 13
Farm Journal 15
Business 16, 17
Sea section 17
Classified 17-22
Sport 22-24
Crossword 24

193 OILMEN FEARED DEAD

5a.m.

Piper Alpha platform blown apart

By DAVID STEELE and IAIN LUNDY

MORE THAN 190 people were missing feared dead last night in what could be the world's worst oilrig disaster.

A massive explosion blew apart the giant Piper Alpha platform, 120 miles north-east of Aberdeen. Early this morning only 39 people were accounted for of the 232 on board.

Rescuers last night described the platform as a "raging inferno" and coastguards spoke of bodies floating in the sea one-and-a-half miles away.

Many of the survivors were flown in to Aberdeen Royal Infirmary this morning with severe burns. Some were picked up from the water by a fleet of rescue helicopters who converged on the scene after the blast.

The 34,000-ton Piper Alpha is operated by Occidental. A spokesman at the RAF Search and Rescue at Pitreavie last night said the platform was "on fire from top to bottom".

The tragedy appears likely to prove far worse than the Alexander Kiehlund, the rig which capsized in the Norwegian sector of the North Sea in March, 1980, with the loss of 123 lives.

The explosion shattered the Piper Alpha at 9.31 p.m. and was followed by a raging fire. It is not known what caused the initial explosion, the third to hit oil installations in the past week.

Four RAF helicopters, an RAF Nimrod and the Sumburgh-based coastguard helicopter

joined a flotilla of vessels in the fire-fighting and rescue operation. Some of the survivors were winched from the sea and others were picked up by passing boats.

One unconfirmed report this morning indicated that a vessel helping in the rescue had blown up.

A Naval task force of six vessels was this morning heading for the disaster scene, as was the minesweeper HMS Blackwater and the P&O ferry St Clair.

The multi-purpose vessel Tharos, which contains emergency medical facilities, treated many of the survivors before they were flown to Aberdeen. Others were treated at Occidental's nearby Claymore platform.

The full extent of the tragedy began to emerge early this morning when rescue services were able to account for only 39 survivors, leaving a total of 193 missing.

The Tharos, specially designed for such emergencies, has accommodation for 300.

The Piper platform was hit by an explosion previously, in 1984, when 56 men required treatment.

Last night's incident followed an explosion the previous night on the Shell-Eso Alpha platform farther north, where oil production has been halted. In that case the explosion was in a gas-compressor. And BP are investigating the cause of an explosion in a gas-compressor at the Sullom Voe terminal in Shetland last Friday.

Pitreavie Search and Rescue Centre said non-essential personnel from the Tharos had been evacuated from the vessel to make way for casualties from the Piper Alpha.

Weather conditions on the field were said to be "reasonable" with visibility about five miles and a southerly wind about four or five and waves about a metre high. The conditions should not hamper the rescue, said a London Weather Centre spokesman.

Gaithness and Sutherland M.P. Mr Robert MacLennan last night said there would need to be a thorough inquiry into the incident.

"We need to find out what has gone wrong," said Mr MacLennan.

It is believed Energy Secretary Mr Cecil Parkinson will face demands for a statement about the incident in the House of Commons today.

A major incident room was set up at Grampian Police headquarters in Aberdeen and relatives of those on board the Piper Alpha should call 0224 649666.

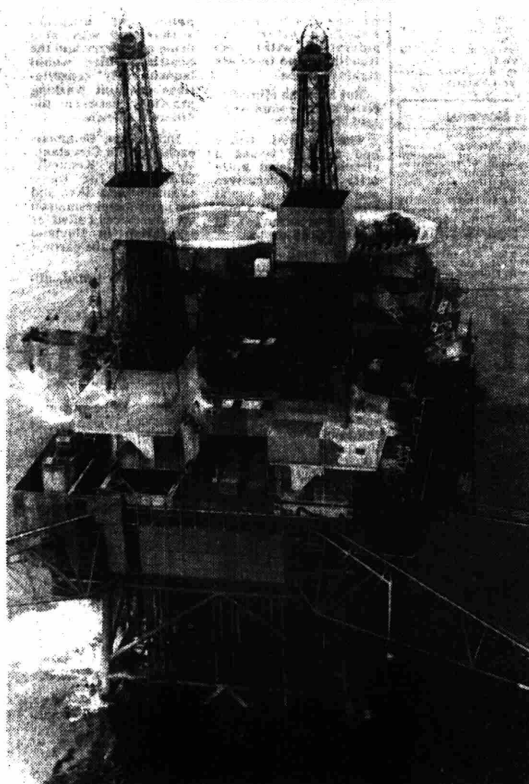
WEATHERGUIDE
Aberdeen, Moray Firth areas: Sunny periods in the morning, showers developing in the afternoon. Warm with light southerly winds.

FULL FORECAST
— PAGE 13



SAFE... a wife hugs her oilman husband after he was flown into Aberdeen with other survivors from the platform blast.

ANOTHER PICTURE — PAGE 12



THE Piper Alpha oil-production platform.

No stranger to accidents...

OCCIDENTAL'S Piper Field came on stream in 1976 and the 34,000-ton platform is no stranger to casualty.

Three men died in October, 1982, when they fell 70ft. from an access gangway on the platform into the North Sea.

And in 1984, 175 men were evacuated from the platform when it was rocked by another explosion. Fifty-five received hospital treatment at that time.

Piper Alpha can hold a maximum of 200

workers and the average daily production in 1987 was 167,200 barrels.

Occidental Petroleum are one of the major operators in the North Sea and have been run for 31 years by American multi-millionaire Dr Armand Hammer.

Earlier this year the company announced a new find five miles from the Piper Field. They are spending £30 million appraising the possibilities of another find in the more remote Birch Field, and won permission at the end of last year to develop the Chanter Field.

Serious accidents part of life on rigs

SERIOUS incidents aboard North Sea drilling and production platforms have been a part of life since the 1960s and the start of the offshore exploration boom.

Structural defects, explosions or the weather have all been to blame.

The first "blow out" was in April, 1977, when at least 20,000 tons of oil escaped into the sea from the oil-rig Bravo in the Norwegian Ekofisk Field run by Phillips Petroleum.

Texas oilman Mr Red Adair was brought to Britain to cap the fracture. It took Adair and his team five attempts to cap the escape, but not before a slick covered 1500 sq. miles.

The most serious incident was in 1980 when 123 crewmen aboard the accommodation platform Alexander Kiehlund died after she capsized in storms in the Ekofisk area.

A ruptured oil pipeline had caused an explosion which killed three men and seriously injured three others in the same block in 1975.

Three people died and 11 were injured when an explosion ripped the bottom out of a drilling barge at Teesport, near Middlesbrough, in November, 1965. A month later, 13 men were killed when the Sea Gem collapsed and sank in the North Sea.

Advice to pilots
BRITISH Airways have reviewed instructions to their pilots flying over the Gulf following the Iranian Airbus tragedy.

BA chief executive Sir Colin Marshall said there were all sorts of precautions their pilots could take.

Sobbing woman greet survivor

By DAVID STEELE

IT WAS 3.20 this morning when the first helicopter arrived with the dawn at the helipad at Aberdeen Royal Infirmary.

Ambulances waited to rush the victims to the accident and emergency unit, a few hundred yards away, where doctors and nurses were ready to go to work on the injured.

A handful of shocked relatives were in the waiting crowd, which included a large Press and TV contingent.

Seven men walked from the Bristow Puma and two were carried out on stretchers. One of the latter had obviously been badly burned and there was a cry for resuscitation equipment as he was carried into the hospital.

As the men walked from an ambulance into the hospital building, a sobbing woman fell into the arms of one of them, obviously overcome to know he was among the survivors. They went into the hospital still clinging to each other.

The helicopter had no sooner disembarked its passengers than it quickly lifted off again, apparently heading back to the disaster scene.

More helicopters were expected at the hospital this morning.



Fit. Lt. HODGSON

SEA KING helicopter captain Fit. Lt. Steve Hodgson who was the first pilot sent to the scene of the disaster last night, has been in the front line for days.

He was on his way to a mountain rescue in the Cairngorms last night when the call came to return to Lossiemouth where he re-fuelled to fly to the Alpha platform and the grueling task of searching for survivors.

Earlier this week he was at the centre of the drama in which premature Orkney baby Sam Marcus — born weeks early at his parents' wedding on Sunday — was rushed by lifeboat to Kirkwall where Fit Lt. Hodgson had to put down in a field because the airport was fogbound.

Last Friday, he had to land, again in dense fog, on the Beach Esplanade at Aberdeen with an English diver who was suffering from the bends

RIG BLAST LATEST

OCCIDENTAL confirmed only 40 out of 232 accounted for. Production from nearby Claymore and Tartan platforms shut down as a precautionary measure. Peter Morrison, Minister of State for Energy, holding a Press conference at Oxy HQ at about 8a.m. Senior Oxy executives from London and California flying to Aberdeen. Oxy Inquiry beginning immediately.

CR SMITH
THE DOUBLE GLAZING
— PRICE —
LEADERS

2 WEEKS ONLY
£3 MILLION
SALE!

THE LOWEST PRICES EVER FROM CR SMITH
BUY NOW - YOU'LL PAY MORE LATER

DIAL 100 AND ASK FOR FREEPHONE CR SMITH
DON'T MISS IT!

CR Smith, Freeport, Gardeners Street, Dumfries
KY12 0EN. NO STAMP NEEDED.

WHERE ONE SATISFIED CUSTOMER LEADS TO ANOTHER

John Hunter
100 ROSEMOUNT PLACE, ABERDEEN TEL. 630967
OPEN 6 DAYS 9.30 - 5.00 p.m.

QUALITY FASHION SALE
TODAY!

SUMMER COATS
By Ennis, Aditya, Lark, Wetherall, Lampert. All greatly reduced. **SAVE AT LEAST 25%**
e.g. £99.50 Now **£74.50**

SUMMER JACKETS
Excellent styles in a variety of colours. **At Least 20% OFF. SAVE £££ on every one**
e.g. £39.95 Now **£48**

RAINWEAR REDUCTIONS
Selected styles now with substantial savings by DANIMAC, HARVEY etc.

SUMMER DRESS SAVINGS
Largely handmade, by choice from and by such well known makers as EASTY, FULTON, RICHARD STUMP, ROD, YVNE, JAMES PRICE, LERDSE etc.
Comprehensive range of styles, fabrics and colours. **SAVE AT LEAST 20%**
e.g. £39.95 Now **£31.50**

CO-ORDINATE CLEARANCE
By DEREKA MATCH SET, EASTY, etc. Skirts, Slacks, Blouses and Jackets, all colour co-ordinated. **SAVE 20% TO 33 1/3%**

GREAT PRICES
On the special savings on all the Dress and Jacket and Dress bought by Social Occasions. **SAVE 20% TO 33 1/3%**

SKIRTS, SLACKS, BLOUSES
Save on today's and new all at substantial savings. **AT LEAST 20% OFF**

DAKS REDUCTIONS
Save on these top quality Skirts, Blouses and Jackets. **ALL NOW REDUCED BY AT LEAST 20%**

MILLINERY REDUCTIONS
By 100 makers such as MITA, LORENZ, CONNOR MELLIS, etc. **REDUCED BY AT LEAST 25%**

EVERY ITEM FROM OUR SUMMER STOCK
(except some names) IS NOW REDUCED. SOME BY AS MUCH AS 50%