

Humberside Coastguard Search and Rescue Helicopters

Captain Jonathan Stanley, Deputy Chief Pilot



As the country slowly starts to wake up from its coronavirus-enforced hibernation, our tasking numbers are increasing. It's worth noting the range of different types of tasking that took place in June, the variety of locations both overland and overwater, and also the times at which some of these tasks have to be carried out which are, perhaps, best described as 'antisocial'. I apologise if you were disturbed by the sound of the aircraft in the small hours, but I hope that the summary below will highlight the serious nature of some of those tasks to which we were responding.

Two of June's 'jobs' are especially noteworthy: the F-15 crash on 15 June which was reported on the local and national news networks and also the recovery of the crewman with COVID-19 symptoms from the oil tanker on 28 June.

It is likely that the USAF pilot did not eject from his aircraft prior to crashing, as no emergency beacon signal could be located. The visual search was made very difficult by the very poor visibility in the area, making the S-92's radar and autopilot functions essential in order to conduct any kind of search in safety. Our crews were eventually relieved by USAF special operations tiltrotor aircraft, which is a first for our base. Sadly this incident did not have a positive outcome, as the pilot's body was recovered some time later.

Prior to undertaking any task where a casualty is believed to be suffering from the COVID-19 virus we must follow a number of protocols to minimise the risk of infection to our crews. The aircraft and rescue equipment must also be thoroughly decontaminated after the task. The incident on 28 June was the first occasion when these protocols have had to be followed in full at Humberside. The rapidity of the casualty's deterioration meant that the winch paramedic and winch operator, who were each wearing survival equipment and antiviral personal protective equipment, went from dealing with a conscious casualty to managing an unconscious casualty in full cardiac arrest in only 12 minutes between leaving the vessel to arriving at the hospital. The outcome was again unfortunate, but the receiving A&E doctor reported that this speedy deterioration is not uncommon in such cases. We can only do our best.

Date	Times	Tasking
6 June	00:11 – 01:24	Search for a vulnerable missing person near Runswick Bay, North Yorkshire. Nothing found before being retasked to a further incident.
6 June	01:24 – 03:00	Retasked from search to a crewman aboard a vessel 35 miles east of Flamborough Head, collapsed and with CPR in progress. Winch paramedic deployed to vessel but unfortunately casualty deceased.
6 June	13:19 – 15:21	Continuation of search for a vulnerable missing person near Runswick Bay. Search carried out but misper not found, so stood down.
13 June	11:28 – 11:43	Scrambled to assist with 2 year-old girl in cardiac arrest, 9 miles south of Kirmington. Stood down on arrival and retasked to further incident.
13 June	11:44 – 13:15	Retasked from previous incident to 64 year old male in cardiac arrest with CPR ongoing at Skegness. Coastguard and ambulance personnel on scene. Landed nearby; casualty carried to the aircraft and taken to Hull Royal Infirmary.
13 June	20:02 – 21:41	24 year old male with fractured femur in remote location near Scunthorpe with ambulance crew en route. Aircraft landed nearby. Casualty carried to the aircraft and taken, along with ambulance paramedic and father, to Hull Royal Infirmary.
15 June	09:54 – 13:29	Tasked to report of USAF F-15 jet crashed in the North Sea. No emergency locator beacon identified, so extensive search carried out in low cloud (approx. 100 ft) and fog patches (visibility down to approx. 50m) in conjunction with surface vessels and USAF airborne co-ordination. Significant debris field located and searched but pilot not found. Relieved by oncoming crew and returned to base.
15 June	12:47 – 15:35	Continuation of search of debris for USAF F-15 pilot in North Sea until relieved by USAF MV-22 Osprey tiltrotor aircraft. Crew returned to base; body of pilot later found and recovered.
17 June	14:24 – 16:30	Diverted from training to a 37 year old female with fractured tibia and fibula (lower leg) following a fall north of Stoke on Trent. Due to the reduced fuel remaining in the aircraft following training, the casualty was taken to Manchester airport for handover to an ambulance crew.
19 June	06:02 – 07:45	Winch rescue of a fishing vessel crewman with an amputated finger 63 miles from Kirmington. Taken to Hull Royal Infirmary.
22 June	18:14 – 19:33	Tasked to investigate emergency beacon transmission in vicinity of Filey Brigg, North Yorkshire. Search carried out in conjunction with three local lifeboats but no beacon identified. False alarm.
23 June	15:53 – 17:20	Requested to assist with recovery of a cliff jumper at South Shields. Stood down on arrival as ambulance crews, ambulance HART, air ambulance and coastguard personnel all on scene and had carried the casualty up nearby steps to a waiting ambulance.
23 June	18:17 – 18:24	Tasked to report of a missing swimmer at Cleethorpes. Stood down shortly after takeoff as no longer required.
25 June	23:40 – 02:49	Search for missing person in the Howgill Fells, northern Pennines. Extensive search carried out but misper not found, so stood down and returned to base.
28 June	03:00 – 06:05	Tasked to recover 55 year old male with COVID-19 symptoms from an oil tanker 20 miles north east of Lowestoft. Casualty's condition had deteriorated in the previous 48 hours. COVID-19 protection protocols followed. The casualty was winched from the vessel and taken to James Paget hospital at Great Yarmouth but deteriorated rapidly and significantly en route and suffered cardiac arrest in the aircraft. Defibrillator used and CPR carried out all the way into A&E at Great Yarmouth, but casualty declared deceased soon after arrival.