

PAYING TRIBUTE TO RESCUE 116 CREW

A four-day cycle to the rescue bases in Dublin, Sligo, Shannon and Waterford, is ear-marked for Friday 8 September, to pay tribute to the crew of R116 and Irish Coast Guard volunteer Caitríona Lucas, who died in a search operation off Co. Clare in September 2016.

The event is called '4 Days in September — A Tribute,' and each leg of the cycle will honour a different crew member.

"The group of friends (who organised the cycle) are all members of the emergency services who work with the Irish Coast Guard on a daily basis and who would have been friendly with some of the helicopter crew who lost their lives," according to a statement released by the organisers.

The 800km cycle will leave from Waterford Airport and head for Dublin Airport, then Sligo and Shannon Airports before returning to Waterford on Monday 11 September.

NETS TO WIDEN SEARCH

Meanwhile, a multi-agency operation using nets to search for the remaining two crew members of Irish Coast Guard helicopter R116 was back on track on Monday 17 July, following bad weather which had hampered some previous efforts and delayed proceedings.

The R116 helicopter crashed into Blackrock Lighthouse off the coast of Mayo in the early hours of March 14, claiming the lives of Captain Dara Fitzpatrick and Captain Mark Duffy. Crew members Ciarán Smith and Paul Ormsby are still missing.

The Irish Coast Guard, in detailing the five-day search operation, noted in a statement: "The Irish Coast Guard, Canadian Helicopter Corporation, An Garda Síochána, Belcross Enterprises (Marine contractors) and with the Marine Institute in support, will begin a five-day trawling campaign using specially modified nets.

"The nets were provided for free by Swan Net-Gundry Ltd based out of Killybegs and will be deployed from a medium-sized fishing vessel called the MFV Westbound."

While the original search operation went on for a month and a second volunteer-led one also took place, which included more than 50 local fishing vessels, this latest search will be the most substantial since May.



The 'R116' crew who lost their lives (clockwise): The bodies of Captain Dara Fitzpatrick and Captain Mark Duffy were recovered but winch operators Ciarán Smith and Paul Ormsby are still missing.

The preliminary report into the crash showed that Blackrock Lighthouse and the island it stands on were not included in a navigational database used by helicopter R116.

The new net search, which is being headed by An Garda Síochána, was due to take place over a five-day period. However, at the time of 'Emergency Services Ireland' going to press (19 July), the timeframe of the search was not known, due to delays because of very bad weather conditions.

ACCIDENT INVESTIGATION

Ireland's Air Accident Investigation Unit issued a preliminary report into the destruction of Rescue 116 at Blackrock, Co. Mayo. Operating in very poor visibility the Coast Guard helicopter crashed into Blackrock Island in the early hours of Tuesday 14 March, while on approach to Blacksod Lighthouse to refuel.

Circumstances determined that the east coast-based Rescue 116 be sent to the west coast to provide top cover for Rescue 118, which was carrying out the medical evacuation of an injured fisherman from a trawler in the Atlantic. It is believed that Rescue 116 crew members were unaware of the island's existence in front of the lighthouse until it was too late to avoid it.

There was a sudden disastrous loss of situational awareness. All four crew members died in the event. The bodies of the pilots were recovered but those of the two winchmen are still missing, in spite of their wearing locator beacons and one of the largest recovery missions ever undertaken in Irish waters.

The following extract from the Preliminary Report may explain why the beacons failed to work: *"The investigation identified a matter of concern relating to the installation of the locator beacons in the lifejackets worn by the pilots. The installation appeared to be in accordance with a picture contained in a Service Bulletin issued by the lifejacket manufacturer showing the GPS antenna in the same pouch as the beacon. However, the beacon manufacturer's publications recommend a minimum separation between beacon and GPS antenna of 30 centimetres (cm). In order to ensure that locator beacons in Mk 44 lifejackets function as expected a safety recommendation is issued to the manufacturer of the lifejackets."*

FLOTILLA TRIBUTE

In another tribute to R116, a flotilla will take place in Carlingford Lough on Sunday 30 July. Including families of the crew, the event is the brainchild of Gerry Sloan and the Rostrevor Sailing Club, and will involve HM Coast Guard, Irish Coast Guard and the RNLI from Clougherhead and Kilkeel. The Irish Naval Service will participate in the event with shore activities on Shore Road Green in Rostrevor and in Carlingford Marina.

The flotilla will leave Warrenpoint Harbour at 3pm on

30 July and proceed to Rostrevor Bay, before a short memorial service at sea at 4.30pm, followed by a Coast Guard fly-past.

All marine vessels on Carlingford Lough are invited to join this Flotilla in memory of the lost crew members from R116. All boats must be registered to participate, which is free, but donations to the RNLI are requested. Proceeds will be shared between Clougherhead RNLI and Kilkeel RNLI.

The Irish Coast Guard, HM Coast Guard, RNLI and Irish Naval Service will participate in the event with shore activities on the Shore Road Green in Rostrevor and in Carlingford Marina.

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