



# Abandon ship!

Uncomfortable, stuffy, cramped and nauseating – your liferaft may leave a lot to be desired, but the alternative, Davy Jones’s locker, is a lot worse ...

The two words ‘Abandon ship!’ are every sailor’s worst nightmare. But they became a reality for Skipper Chris Hubbard, 31, and his mate Karl Scrivens, 49, when their beam trawler sank in seconds on 17 September 2013. Their liferaft was the only thing between them and the freezing water for 2 hours until Yarmouth lifeboat came to their aid.

Chris was in his bunk bed when the boat suddenly capsized, filling the wheelhouse with water. He recalled: ‘I made it up to the surface and shouted to Karl. He was underneath the liferaft so together we righted it and realised the situation we were in. The liferaft was still tied to the boat so we had to cut that free because we were worried we might go down with her. I didn’t have time to grab clothes, or a radio – I managed to grab three flares and that’s what we used to try and get someone’s attention. I was freezing cold in just my shorts and those were the longest 2 hours of my life. When I saw the lifeboat coming towards us it was such a relief. I just thought “brilliant – we’re saved”.’



See the video of this rescue at [RNLI.org/abandonship](https://www.rnli.org/abandonship)

## LIFERAFT INNOVATION

The new liferaft for the RNLI all-weather lifeboat fleet

Delayed canopy inflation, giving water pockets underneath a chance to fill, and reducing chance of raft capsizing or blowing away when deployed.

Zip entrance exchanged for ties and Velcro strips, which are less likely to break.

Increased capacity of water pockets from 55 litres to 75 litres. Two pockets on edge immediately facing entrance, making it more stable and easier to board.

Clear instructions for crew printed on sponsons both inside and outside.

Increased abrasion resistance.

Thermal floor is stitched to base, preventing it from coming loose when fully loaded or flooded.

Boarding arrangements now consist of an aluminium-rung boarding ladder, step at top that deploys with liferaft, and hand-over-hand internal ladder for crew to pull themselves in.

Raft protected by vacuum-sealed bag to prevent damage from water ingress.

Specially designed case includes additional handholds for flat or side stowage, and easier handling. Case will fit into existing stowage space on all lifeboats.



### Cold-water shock

Chris and Karl were lucky to survive being immersed in the water. Cold-water shock causes uncontrollable gasping, leading to water being drawn into the lungs and also the heart rate doubling, leading to cardiac arrest. In water temperatures of 15°C and below, the risk of death through the effects of cold water shock dramatically increases. With average sea temperatures around the British Isles coastline being just 12°C, the risk is a constant presence for sailors in our waters. Thankfully, it wasn't long before Chris and Karl climbed into the liferaft, which almost certainly saved their lives.

### The last resort

But lifeboat crews know that the liferaft is the last resort. All crew members train to

abandon ship by jumping from a 4m platform into the RNLI's sea survival pool, and endure 20 minutes in a liferaft with realistic simulated effects including darkness, towering waves, lashing rain and howling wind. Being squashed into a small, dark, damp liferaft is never a pleasant experience, and it is not unusual for sick bags to come out, as crew member Chris Speers from Poole Lifeboat Station found out.

'We were crammed in – it was a six-man raft, and there were six of us wearing full kit and fully inflated lifejackets.

'It was so realistic, you really felt like you were getting battered in the middle of the ocean. About half of the people in the raft were sick, and it was a chain effect. It was the heat that set me off – we couldn't keep the door open because of the rain outside.

'Each of us was given a task – casualty care, holding up a flare when the simulated helicopter went overhead, bailing out water. Remembering your training gave you something to focus on.

'I wouldn't look forward to abandoning ship in a real situation, but thanks to the training I know that I'm prepared for it. It's also given me an insight into what it would be like for a casualty to be rescued from a liferaft.'

Keith Colwell, RNLI Community Incident Reduction Manager and author of *RYA Sea Survival Handbook*, has some advice for sea goers who are unfortunate enough to face abandoning ship:

'Before you abandon ship, make sure there is absolutely no other choice. While your boat is still afloat, it will probably be a better equipped and more pleasant place to

## LIFERAFT SAFETY TIPS:

- Make a mayday call using VHF radio, set off an EPIRB or PLB (distress alert devices), or let off distress flares.
- Ensure everyone is wearing correctly fitted lifejackets with crotch straps.
- Take seasick pills and drink as much water as possible before boarding raft.
- Make sure the liferaft painter is secured to the boat before launching raft.
- Take your grab bag, extra clothing, carbohydrate-rich food and as much water as possible.
- Don't inflate your liferaft on the deck – it is designed to inflate in water on the downwind side of the boat, unless the vessel is on fire.
- Don't abandon ship before you have to.
- Try to get from the sinking vessel into the liferaft without getting wet. Step up into the liferaft when it's at the top of a wave, rather than jumping down into it.



### FIND OUT MORE

You can find out what it's like to abandon ship in choppy seas and take to a liferaft at the RNLI Nautical Skills Weekend on 1–2 March at RNLI College, Poole. See [RNLI.org/college](http://RNLI.org/college) or call 01202 336141.

Also see [rya.org.uk](http://rya.org.uk) Specialist Short Courses for a sea survival course near you.

survive than a liferaft, even in a pretty bad state. Rescuers will also find your boat easier to spot.'

Keith also recommends going on a sea survival course and servicing your raft at the prescribed intervals by a reputable service agent: 'It could save you and your crews' lives.'

### RNLI savings

All 160 all-weather lifeboats in the RNLI fleet are fitted with liferafts, but thankfully our volunteer crew members have never had to use them in a real sea survival situation.

Last Autumn, the RNLI began rolling out a new model of liferaft to every all-weather lifeboat in the fleet. The existing liferafts are ageing, and the cost of servicing them every year is mounting. The new liferafts, built and supplied by Southampton-based company

Ocean Safety, will only need servicing once every 4 years, saving the RNLI hundreds of thousands of pounds in servicing costs – enough to pay for the roll out.

### Taking safety seriously

They also include a range of innovative safety features, as illustrated on the previous page. The old liferafts will be returned to the supplier, who will recycle as much as possible to ensure the minimum goes to landfill. Liferafts that are still in good condition will be used for training at RNLI College.

Allen Stevens, Senior Engineer (Marine Safety) sums up their importance: 'Liferafts are a vital piece of safety equipment. We're committed to ensuring that our volunteer crews are as safe as possible while saving lives at sea. The new Ocean Safety liferafts

are an innovative and cost-effective solution to our requirements, and will keep crews safe for years to come.'

Yarmouth Coxswain Howard Lester is reassured to know that the RNLI takes liferaft safety seriously:

'As lifeboat crews, we all feel confident that we won't ever need our liferafts, but it is definitely a comfort to know that if the worst happens, it is there. Those two men were very lucky that they had a liferaft onboard and deployed it correctly. It saved their lives.'

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