



'I will never forget them' - Laila Ausland Cock

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West Gamma 30 years on: 'I had decided to say goodbye'

The Norwegian radio telegraphist Laila Ausland Cock had spent 20 minutes in a frothing sea and had given up any hope of rescue when the 'Esvagt Protector's crew found her.

Laila Ausland Cock's first trip offshore on board the accommodation rig West Gamma should prove to be one she would never forget.

The 43-year-old radio telegraphist was only in her second training week when the rig hit a violent storm.

‘The storm raged on for hours, and the rig was creaking and howling awfully in the wind. It was sheer psychological terror. When the sea ripped the helicopter deck off the rig, my colleague became speechless and aghast. Then I knew it was serious’, says Laila Ausland Cock.

When there was no doubt the rig might capsize, everybody on board was ordered into survival suits. Then the rig’s captain gathered everybody on deck.

‘It was almost a relief to get to the point of jumping into the sea. It felt like jumping to my death, but after so many hours of anxiety, I had come to the conclusion that it was best to get it over with’, says Laila Ausland Cock.

Drifted away

On deck, the rig’s captain indicated to the rig crew when to jump:

‘We were tied together in groups of 3-4 and were told to drift towards the awaiting three rescue vessels. I had just been on a safety course, and it inspired a certain calmness. I knew for sure that I could float in my survival suit until somebody picked me up’, she says.

But something went wrong.

‘I didn’t jump at the right time. The waves were 12-15 metres high, and I fell many metres. I hit the water hard and had to let go of the rope immediately. When I finally got to the surface again, I was alone; I had drifted far away from the pick-up zone. It had taken no time for me to resurface at a completely wrong spot’, says Laila Ausland Cock.

Between the waves, she could see the rescue vessels in the distance. She had swallowed a lot of water.

‘The safety suit kept me afloat, but... even though I closed my mouth and eyes, when the waves rolled over me, it would create such pressure through the nose, which forced my mouth open. There was nothing I could do’, she says.

Said goodbye

Over the course of fifteen minutes, Laila Ausland Cock went through the stages of crisis from tiny hope and confused struggle to melancholy and resignation.

‘A helicopter from Ekofisk found me, but they didn’t have any rescue equipment on board. They were shining their projector at me, but couldn’t pick me up’, says Laila Ausland Cock:

‘I knew I was going to die, and I was sad that I wouldn’t see my two sons again. But I actually remember it as peaceful. I said goodbye’.

She had lain in the water for so long that she thought she was dead. Then her fortune turned for the better.

‘The crew from the ‘Esvagt Protector’s rescue boat had seen me disappear between the waves multiple times, and they kept looking until they found me’, says Laila Ausland Cock:

‘It felt like a voice from heaven: “You are saved!”

One big smile

She tried to answer, but could only hear herself snuffle.

‘Very far away, I could feel someone slap me, and I thought that it might be to wake me up. So I said: “That was nice, do it again”. You see, I had said goodbye to the idea of ever feeling another human hand again’, says Laila Ausland Cock.

On board the vessel, she was smiling from ear to ear. Exhausted, shaken – but relieved.

‘Others were crying, yet I couldn’t but smile. It was such an amazing feeling to be alive’, she says.

After the incident, Laila Ausland Cock became a strong voice in the Norwegian debate about preparedness and safety in the North Sea, as a voice from the margin between life and death.

‘It was an incident that changed me. I did my part to change the Norwegian understanding of safety at sea. The Norwegian rescue boats were not as good as the Danish; not as manoeuvrable at all. West Gamma and ESVAGT’s performance showed what was needed to make a difference’, says Laila Ausland Cock:

‘What the Danish seamen achieved that day was absolutely fantastic. Nobody could have done what they did. I am so very grateful that they were there’, says Laila Ausland Cock.

About ESVAGT

ESVAGT is a dedicated provider of safety and support at sea and a market leader within offshore wind solutions.

We support the offshore Oil & Gas industries with a wide range of specialized services: Standby, Emergency Response and Rescue Vessels (ERRV), Oil spill response, Firefighting, Tanker assists, Rig moves, Supply services and Interfield transfer of cargo and personnel.

We service offshore wind farms and have a fleet of dedicated Service Operation Vessels (SOV), which ESVAGT pioneered in 2010. The SOVs provide accommodation for technicians, spare time facilities, offices and conference room, storage for small turbine parts, workshops, etc. The SOV offers flexible personnel and equipment transfer capabilities by either Walk-to-Work gangway system or Safe Transfer Boats.

ESVAGT was founded in 1981 and has a fleet of more than 40 vessels and approximately 1000 employees on- and offshore.

Contacts



Heidi Boddum

Press Contact

Marketing & Communications Coordinator

hbo@esvagt.com

+45 78 730 772