

Members of the units of the SADF involved in the

Oceanos Rescue Mission

MENDI DECORATION FOR BRAVERY IN SILVER

AWARDED TO
MEMBERS OF THE UNITS
OF THE FORMER SADF
INVOLVED IN THE
OCEANOS RESCUE MISSION
FOR ACTS OF BRAVERY
AND VALOUR DISPLAYED
DURING THE RESCUE
MISSION TO SAVE
PASSENGERS AND CREW
OF THE OCEANOS CRUISE
LINER IN AUGUST 1991



Within 25 minutes of confirming that the *Oceanos*, with 587 passengers and crew on board was in distress along the coast, near East London, the Officer Commanding Rescue Co-ordination Centre launched a rescue mission which has become a textbook illustration of maritime rescue professionalism, indeed a benchmark studied by many rescue centres across the world.

Helicopters were immediately dispatched from Durban, Pretoria and Cape Town, and other ships and craft in the vicinity were summoned to provide immediate assistance to the ship.

The first SANDF personnel on the scene found it to be listing badly to the starboard side and in imminent danger of sinking. South African Navy divers set about destroying cables and other protuberances to enable the rescue helicopters to get in closer to facilitate quicker evacuation.

Complementing a rescue operation by boat, the SAAF helicopters executed a seamless operation, with helicopter after helicopter ferrying to shore, passengers and crew hoisted up from the badly listed ship. When 21 passengers remained unaccounted for, erroneously as it turned, Navy divers re-entered the badly listed ship which they searched from stern to stern. The last divers were finally evacuated after they were certain that no one was left behind, merely 25 minutes before the *Oceanos* sank. All 587 passengers and crew were rescued with no loss of life.

The complicated mission demonstrated outstanding inter-service co-operation and tested the flying and diving skills, airmanship, judgement, dedication, endurance and perseverance of all SADF personnel involved in the operation. Moreover, all the navy and airforce personnel involved distinguished themselves by placing themselves in imminent danger throughout the mission.

The *Oceanos* Rescue Mission is a remarkable feat in the annals of maritime history which received much international acclaim and praise.