



## EMERGENCY SITUATIONS

### GORDON

Sea kayaking is all about being self-reliant. So in this film we'll show you two things. Firstly, the preparations you can make before going kayaking to ensure a simple incident doesn't become something much more serious. Secondly, if you do have to call out the professionals, what you can do to help them perform a safe and effective rescue.

### SIMON

*Everything in this film is an exercise involving the rescue services of the United Kingdom. We couldn't have made it without the support of the Coastguard and the Royal National Lifeboat Institution. Seeing how a series of emergency situations unfold, from raising the alarm to eventual rescue, provides a unique insight. We'll share the advice from the experts who carry out the rescues, so if you need to call for help, you'll also know how to help yourself.*

*While rescue services and techniques may vary between different countries, the key learning points for sea kayakers are unchanged around the world.*



### SIMON

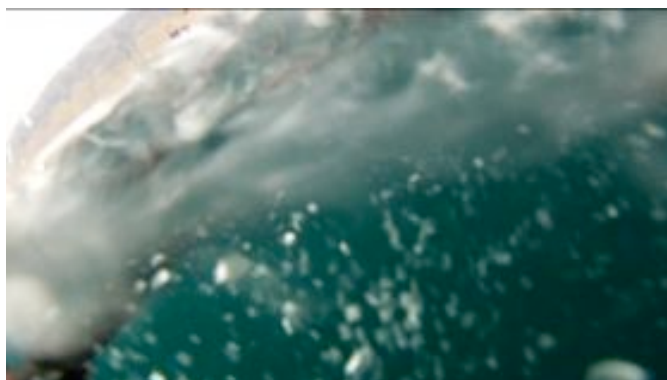
*The scenario Gordon has created for our first exercise is all too common. It is based on real emergencies carried out by the rescue services with whom we've worked. Four kayakers are paddling off a shore with no landing places. The wind increases, the sea becomes rougher, and soon they're in conditions they cannot handle.*



Copyright Sunart Media. All rights reserved worldwide.  
For expert coaching contact Gordon Brown at [SkyakAdventures.com](http://SkyakAdventures.com)



*Liz has capsized. The wind has caught her kayak and it is swept away. Even though Liz is wearing a dry suit, it's February and her core temperature will fall rapidly. Always wear the correct buoyancy aid for your size and weight. Liz's is helping keep her afloat.*



GORDON

Liz, can you look at me. I'm just going to come in. I want you to hold on to the front of my boat. Keep hold of your paddle. Guys will you come and give me a hand here, raft up alongside me. Calum, just come in alongside here. Liz, keep the kayak at the side of your head.

Any time we have a casualty in the water we have to get them out as quickly as possible. Liz just watch out for Donald's boat here, he's coming in alongside.



SIMON

*We recreated the scenario in calm water, with different paddlers, so we can follow this through, step by step.*

GORDON

So what we're going to do is approach them and make sure that they're OK and that they're not going to grab us at all. So just come in alongside me Andy here. Liz if you can hold on to the front of my kayak, just have the boat to the side of your head Liz.



Andy if you come in alongside. We need to just make sure we're nice and stable in the raft here, paddles in front of us. If you hold on here, other hand across the cockpit. And Mike,

just the same grip that Andy has. Liz if you come alongside here, because you loose much less heat when you're out of the water. You hold onto my deck-lines, pull yourself up and on, and then turn round into a good comfortable position there. If you lie down then we can make sure that you're nice and warm there.

(Rougher water)

GORDON

Just work your way along here then climb onto Donald's boat from where you are.

SIMON

*The survival time of a person in the sea is affected by the wind, water temperature, and especially clothing. Winter or summer, in a force 3-4 wind, if you are wearing light kit which lets water contact your body, you're at risk of hypothermia and drowning after just half an hour. In an insulated dry suit it's more than three hours.*



*With Liz out of immediate danger we move into the first phase of the rescue.*

*Initial Distress Alert*

*The Initial Distress Alert is what the coastguard calls this. For kayakers it means calling for help.*

GORDON

Mayday, mayday, mayday, this is sea kayak Gordon, sea kayak Gordon, sea kayak Gordon.

Get it out of the pocket and switch it on. Make sure it's on channel 16 and high power, and it is. And what we're going to do, we're going to call "Mayday". We say that three times and we give our name, 'sea kayak Gordon in this case'. And we're going to tell them where we are, who we are and what's wrong. So we're going to say we've had a paddler in the water for a while, we've lost a kayak, and we need immediate assistance. If we don't have enough power to get to the Coastguard, and there's other boats about, then they can do the mayday relay. So they can transmit our information to the Coastguard and that way we've got communications then.

GORDON

Mayday sea kayak Gordon. My position is one mile south of Eilean Mor, we have four kayakers, one in the water without a kayak. Request urgent assistance, Mayday sea kayak Gordon.

ANNE YOUNG

Mayday sea kayak Gordon, this is Stornoway Coastguard, say again your position, over.

SIMON

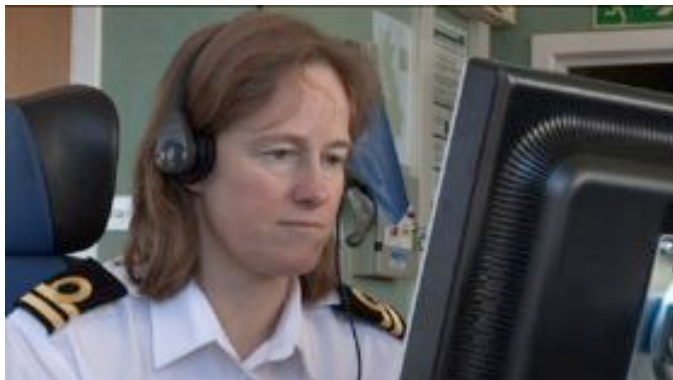
*VHF and mobile phone are the preferred ways to make the initial distress alert because they offer two-way communication with rescue services. They can gather all the information they require, while those needing rescue can be reassured help is on its way. In most countries Dialling 112 on a mobile phone will connect you to emergency services. In some countries*

*you don't need a roaming connection or even a SIM card. We'll consider other methods of raising the alarm later.*

*The call is handled by Coastguard Anne Young. She's also HM Coastguard's Canoeing and Kayaking National Liaison Officer.*

ANNE YOUNG

Mayday sea kayak Gordon, this is Stornoway Coastguard, roger. Confirm number of persons and kayaks, over.



SIMON

*Notice the call sign, sea kayak Gordon. In busy areas, there can be several parties calling themselves Sea Kayak one or sea kayak red, which can confuse rescuers. Pick a distinctive call sign.*

ANNE YOUNG

You're doing the full listening, and you're thinking, and you're typing. But you're also trying to build up that visual picture in your head of where they are, how many people there are, what the situation is, where's the helicopters, what assets are there, are there any other assets that might be nearby? Really, how urgent it is.

"They're requiring immediate assistance".

MURDO MACAULAY

So if you inform them, I'll scramble the helicopter now, then we'll look at getting a plot and search plan created.

ANNE YOUNG

OK. Grand. I'll let them know.

ALUN TINK

Once the call comes through, some of the crew will automatically start changing into their immersion kit. Get the relevant information and through consultation with the Captain determine whether on not we require extra fuel and also how long it will take us to get there.

COPILOT

Check one two. And starting, one two.

**ALUN TINK**

The aircraft is primed and ready to go at any time. We have to be airborne within fifteen minutes during the day and forty-five minutes by night.

I think the way to look at it is, anyone can get into trouble. We would rather know sooner rather than later. By calling the Coastguard earlier, it doesn't necessarily mean they will scramble assets, but at least they know about it and can plan for it.

**SIMON**

*Captain of the helicopter is Alun Tink and he is a sea kayaker.*

**ALUN TINK**

There's a road down to the beach over there, quite a steep road, and you can launch the kayaks from there and you can kayak around the head.



Particularly where we work on the west coast of Scotland the weather can change quite dramatically, day can become night.

The longer it takes for someone to be found can determine whether they live. Delaying a rescue can turn day into night, which as soon as you go into night, a lot of the workload of the crew involves keeping the aircraft safe at night around what could be a coastline.

Therefore they actually have less capacity to do the searching. In addition to that you're using artificial lights such as search lights or an infrared camera, and that in itself is not as good as the old mark-one eyeball.



**SIMON**

*It can be a long time before rescuers reach an incident.*

**GORDON**

So if you try turning over onto your tummy Liz.

**SIMON**

*So kayakers must look after one another, keep themselves warm with storm cags, hats and especially gloves. The casualty has also to be kept stable on the raft. Gordon and the team have experimented putting a casualty in different positions, and found what works well.*

**MIKE SULLIVAN**

Because she's holding the strap on my buoyancy aid, and I'm arm round her shoulder. We've got a good connection there we'd be able to communicate with each other. But even if I was to leave go of the raft in that position for any reason the pressure is on. Whereas when I was around like that I was very twisted, and I'm really pulling there. When actually, I don't need.. you've got me really secure there and Andy's backing me up as well. And because the paddles are jammed between us... out-rigging... it's really solid.



**ANDY STAMP**

They're under my arm which is part of the bracing on this.

(Rougher water)

**GORDON**



So when the helicopter arrives it's very noisy, lots of spray. We need to make sure that anything that can blow away we have secured.

I'll get this hood away as well Donald, just in case it ends up flapping about.

So anything like hats, and the hoods are all tied

away and everything is secure. Map cases we want them away as well. Maybe compasses, if there's a compass on a lanyard, we don't want that flapping about and maybe injuring us. Anything that can be loose we just don't want to be loose at all.

#### ALUN TINK

If you're recovering a kayaker from land, put all the kayaks to one side and get a member of your kayak team to lie on top of them to secure them so they're not affected by the downdraft. Keep all your equipment together in one bundle and keep it nice and secure.

#### SIMON

*Our kayakers know help is coming and they've stowed all the loose gear. We're now in phase two of the rescue. Attracting attention.*

#### ALUN TINK

It can be very easy to see a kayak and it can also be very difficult to see a kayak.



If, for example, the kayak is pointing directly towards the helicopter, it means there is a very small target for the pilot or the aircrew to see.

That makes it very, very difficult to spot.

If the kayak is abeam to the helicopter and we can see the full length of it then it's easier to spot.

If it's in a big sea it may or may not be disappearing behind troughs, and this is where items such as flares and strobes come in.

#### GORDON

First thing I'm going to do is put the strobe on, it's on my shoulder here.

#### ALUN TINK

When you're looking for something, anything that's slightly out of the ordinary catches your eye and tends to be what you lock onto.

A flashing strobe does exactly that.



#### WINCH-OPERATOR

Sea kayak Gordon this is Coastguard 100.

#### ALUN TINK

The aircraft has homing equipment on board and we can trace your signal to your location. So any transmissions on a VHF marine band radio we can pick up and we'll get indications within the helicopter telling us where that signal is coming from.



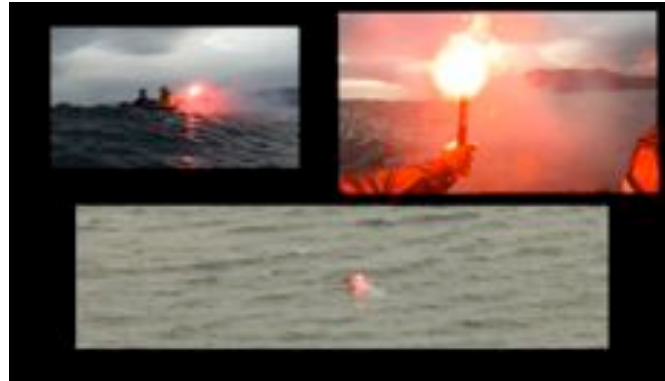
Yeah, so there's the signal. Gordon is transmitting at the moment so we're homing in on his signal – that's where the signal is coming from.

When he stops transmitting you'll see that we lose the signal, that needle will suddenly drop away, there it goes.

So as long as they're transmitting on the frequency, we can get a direction of where they're coming from, and therefore we can find out where they are.

#### SIMON

*The best way to attract attention is a pinpoint red flare. They burn for about a minute. Double ended day night flares burn for much less time, as we'll see later. Flares are very hot and dangerous, so hold them as the instructions recommend, and ensure they're fired downwind of the raft.*



#### ALUN TINK

In my personal experience as a search and rescue pilot I find a hand-held red flare is much easier to see than a hand-held orange smoke flare. The problem you find with orange smoke flares is the smoke can disperse very, very easily in strong winds. Also the stronger the wind, the flatter the flare tends to be, in other words, the smoke doesn't go very high. That makes it harder to be seen by the pilot. A hand-held red flare, with a bright flame coming out of it, is very easy to spot day or night.

Never assume that the helicopter has seen you. Keep identifying your position until it becomes obvious that the crew have actually seen you.



When a helicopter is in flight, it acquires an electrostatic charge.

When the winchman is lowered to water, the static charge attempts to discharge itself through the cable.

This is why we have at the end of the cable we have what we call a static discharge lead. Never under any circumstances grab the static discharge lead until it has been earthed.

It's easier and its safer for a helicopter to winch a casualty from a boat or from land, so wherever possible try and get to land or try to get the casualty onto a bigger boat. What will happen is firstly the helicopter will try and position downwind of the casualty that's in the water. The winchman will then be lowered from the helicopter to about five to ten feet above the surface of the sea. As the helicopter moves toward the casualty, the aircraft may well climb to reduce the effect of downdraft on the surface.





As the winchman approaches the casualty we use a technique called trawling whereby part of his legs are in the water which gives him some form of directional control as he approaches the casualty. As he approaches the casualty, he'll be looking to put a strop underneath the arms of the casualty. The pilot and the crew of any rescue helicopter will try to minimise the effect of downdraft effect on any group of kayakers as much as they possibly can.

WINCHMAN  
OK?



ALUN TINK  
We would never winch a kayaker directly out of the cockpit of a kayak so where possible, form a raft and lie on the raft, and we would lift you off the top of the raft.

WINCHMAN  
You all right Liz?

ALUN TINK  
Once the casualty has been removed from the raft, they remain a couple of feet above the surface whilst the helicopter moves the winchman and the casualty away from the raft. As it moves away from the raft, the helicopter will begin its descent so that the winchman and the casualty are no more than forty feet above the surface at any point. At forty feet they'll be recovered back into the helicopter.



WINCH OPERATOR  
He's on the step. At the door. Got a hand-hold. He's on board. Clear above. Clear to manoeuvre.

ALUN TINK  
OK, decoupling.

**SIMON**

*Different rescue services may use different techniques, but from the kayaker's perspective the key learning points are unchanged. But in real life helicopter rescue is not always available. You might not be able to make the initial distress alert on a VHF radio, which may be out of range. So we conducted a second exercise in which Gordon and the team made some deliberate mistakes.*

**SIMON**

*In this exercise the group will make mistakes. They've left equipment behind, some of which is considered mandatory for sea kayakers in some countries.*

*The scenario Gordon has set up is this. He and Andy are with two other kayakers on a long day journey.*



*They stopped while afloat for a snack, but didn't pay attention, and their paddles floated off. They are not carrying spares.*

*To make it feel real, they've handed their paddles to Mike and Liz. For the scenario, Gordon will send that pair to search for the missing paddles.*

*The group will become separated.*

**GORDON**

If you're on a long day's journey and you do stop for a snack, if you're not paying attention to your paddles it's highly likely that they're going to drift off.

**SIMON**

*Loosing both sets of paddles is not uncommon, particularly after a rescue.*

**GORDON**

The big problem is, when you've lost your paddle, we've lost any ability to keep warm and stability as well. "Grab onto my boat here Andy".



SIMON

Gordon has to get Andy out of the water as soon as possible. Meanwhile Mike and Liz, still searching for the missing paddles, have disappeared from view. Gordon quickly gets Andy back in his kayak, but they are feeling vulnerable.

GORDON

It's very lonely sitting, even with someone you know, and waiting for something to happen, when you are helpless. It's also very cold.

SIMON

*And the sun is fading. If this was real, the pair would be in grave and imminent danger. So they move to the first phase of rescue - the initial distress alert.*

GORDON

So what we're going to do is set off a PLB, a personal locator beacon. Normally we would call for help on a VHF radio but we've left that in the car today. So what I'm going to do is use a PLB and what it does is, it sends a signal to the satellite, and that goes then relayed to the Coastguard closest to us. Pull it up, pull the top off, and then release the aerial. Press the On button, and hold it up to the sky, and wait.



SIMON

*When a VHF is out of range or has a flat battery, a Personal Locator Beacon with GPS will raise the alarm.*

ANNE YOUNG

More and more of them are coming with a GPS automatically now and that just says, "you're there... you should be there" and that means we can focus in a lot quicker and a lot easier.

SIMON

*Making the Initial Distress Alert with a Personal Locator Beacon that transmits a GPS fix is the second preferred method because it gives the rescue services precise information. They know rescue is needed and the location. Those calling for help know it will be coming.*

*Rescue services don't know numbers of people, but they do know kayaks are involved, if the PLB is registered.*

ANNE YOUNG

We need to know who you are and what your vessel is. Otherwise, if we just receive a signal with a position, we have no idea whether we're going to go to a tanker with twelve people on board, a single kayak. There's no point in sending one lifeboat if there's going to be hundreds of people in difficulty, and there's no point in sending twenty lifeboats to a single kayak.

SIMON

*New VHF radios with digital selective calling, DSC, have a distress alert button, but are less effective than a PLB as they rely on being in VHF range of the rescue services or another vessel.*



ANNE YOUNG

So other vessels can still pick it up and it can travel slightly further than your VHF communications, verbal communications, because it's digital.

SIMON

*Until PLBs became more affordable, parachute flares were the second way of raising the alarm if voice communication failed.*

ANNE YOUNG

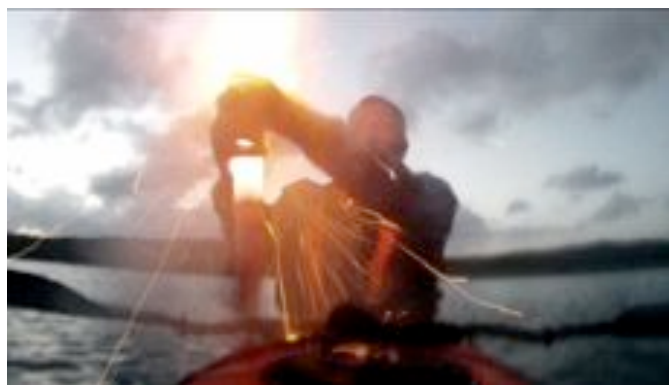
You're not allowed to fire red flares for practice so no body really gets the chance to set off a parachute flare just to get the feeling of what it's like. Holding a dummy and trying that is not the same.

SIMON

*So we sought permission for Gordon to test-fire a parachute flare from a sea kayak so you could see the effect. We made quite a discovery. The major problems are; this has to be seen; those in distress don't know whether there will be a response; and the rescue services receive no information about the nature of the incident. But we discovered something else.*

GORDON

A huge kick back and the flare tube that you would hold onto shot out of my hand, hit the cockpit coaming then bounced off. And we have some footage of that. And it's incredible to see the whole flame stack running through my hands. I ended up with a very bruised hand.



**SIMON**

*We showed these pictures to the importers who told us some brands of flares are more powerful than others.*

**GORDON**

So my thoughts on parachute flares; while it's a good thing to carry, I think I would modify how I would fire one. I'd probably want to be lying over someone else's kayak when I set it off. Because sitting upright, it's quite a shock when it does go off. Even if you're holding it out to the side or in front of you, but anything that can keep it away from you is good. In any sort of rough water I don't know how you'd manage to do it and stay upright.

**MURDO MACAULAY**

Coastguard. Yes, OK. We have a 406 PLB activation at 17:30 UTC. And what's the position for that?

**SIMON**

*The Personal Locator Beacon which Gordon activated sent its GPS fix, via satellite, to the main receiving station. They've passed the details of the location to the nearest coastguard, along with the knowledge it's registered to a kayaker.*

**ANNE YOUNG**

Coastguard here. Requesting launch of lifeboat for PLB activation for a kayaker. We have the position as approximately one mile south of Chicken Rock.



**SIMON**

*The coxswain of this lifeboat is something of a legendary sea kayaker himself. Murty Campbell led the first kayak trip to the remote island of North Rona. He's chairman of Stornoway canoe club. Even with a GPS position from a locator beacon, sea kayakers are difficult target to spot.*

**MURTY CAMPBELL**

It's still very difficult to find kayakers, because they're such a small target. Especially if they're on the water and you've got the chop, the chop of the water. We can go to the

position we were given by the Coastguards. If we're going to a vessel it's very easy to spot because we can pick it up on the radar, it's big, we can see it. A kayaker in the sea, even on a calm day, can be very difficult, especially if the visibility is poor.



#### CREWMAN

There you go, Murty. Between the Chicken and the Head.

#### MURTY CAMPBELL

In a bit of a chop it's completely different. You lose these people in the swells maybe even a hundred meters away. So visibility of the kayaker is very important.

#### SIMON

*What he doesn't know yet is that he'll be searching for two sets of kayakers tonight. Liz and Mike went to search for Gordon and Andy's missing paddles. As we switch to night vision we find them disorientated, with no way of summoning help, and no way of returning to Gordon and Andy. They head for the shore and keep warm by using their spare clothing and group shelter.*



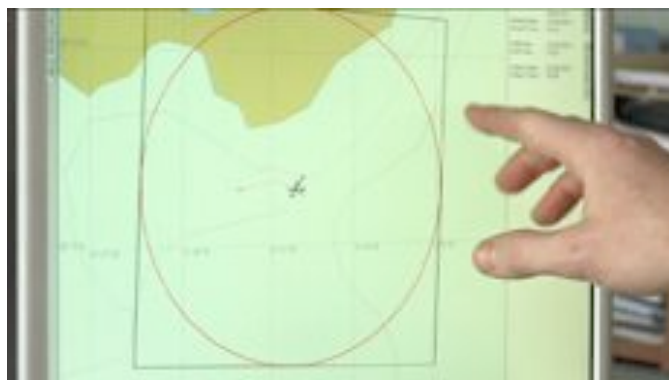
The coastguard don't yet know they're looking for two sets of paddlers. In almost all kayak incidents they dispatch volunteer rescue teams to act as spotters. This team will search for the source of the PLB activation.

#### ANNE YOUNG

Obviously kayakers are often close in shore. So the Lifeboat might not want to get in too close if it's a bit choppy, whereas our guys can just be walking along and they can just be looking over edges. If necessary they can set up and do a cliff rescue, drop down to a cliff and pick up kayakers that have got trapped. There have been a few incidents like that. They've gone in and the surf's now come up so much that they're not happy to come back out again because they know they're not going to make it. They put in a call, Coastguard team come along, set up the rope rescue, drop down and actually taken the people back up that way.

**SIMON**

*We're now in phase two of this rescue - attracting attention. Gordon has turned on his strobe, one of the best ways to be seen from a boat or from the air. Without paddles, he and Andy are drifting, but the PLB updates the Coastguard with their GPS position. If it wasn't working the coastguard could use its Search and Rescue Information System.*

**MURDO MACAULAY**

This is SARIS, this is our search planning computer. What it works on is a combination of tidal and wind databases and information.

**SIMON**

*Using historic and predicted weather, wind and tide patterns, Murdo Macaulay can predict where different sizes of targets will drift over time.*

**MURDO MACAULAY**

And when we finish our model we can click OK, and what you see there now is our particular target. Our model is ready to be run and this will then give us our search area. So I click there and what we see now is our target has ran with tide followed by wind, and then finally it has built up this area based on the errors we have input to the system.

**SIMON**

*SARIS can then suggest the best search pattern for whatever vessel or aircraft is searching and the visual size of the target.*

**MURDO MACAULAY**

Once we've done that, all this can be passed to our unit, we can then tidy up any small parameters they may want to alter, and then they can be left to search the area.

**SIMON**

*The lifeboat is fitted direction finding equipment, similar to the helicopter, so they can home in on a VHF signal. But our kayakers aren't carrying a VHF.*

CREWMAN

There are two quick flashes.

*SIMON*

*Even though the crew know precisely what they're searching for in this exercise, it is impossible to see the kayakers and very hard to spot the strobe.*

MURTY CAMPBELL

It's very, very difficult. Unless they've got something to show you where they actually are, like a flare or light or something like that. If somebody hasn't got anything like that it's very near impossible.

GORDON

I think I'm seeing a boat over there Andy. Yeah I think so. I think I should fire off a flare. I've got one in my front pocket here. OK, good. Here's hoping the hands work enough for this. Oh, dear me.



*SIMON*

*This is how long the red end of a day-night red pinpoint flare burns. If your life depends upon it, it might seem to burn out all too quickly, so you might wish to carry more than one. From the lifeboat it looked very small. But was it seen.*

ANDY

Nice and warm!

GORDON

I think I'll just duck that in the water.

MURTY CAMPBELL

One of the crew spotted a red flare to port there, so we're just going over to take a look. More than likely that is the casualties.

GORDON

I'm shaking. They're coming around, coming around.

MURTY CAMPBELL

You never know what the situation is going to be until you actually get there. You don't actually know how you're going to deal with it until you get on scene.

*SIMON*

*There are several ways of getting kayakers onto a lifeboat. One crew member is in an immersion suit so he can swim a line to a casualty in the water. So we can demonstrate this technique Andy has capsized, and after two hours just floating, the cold water hits him hard.*





CREWMAN IN THE WATER

OK I've got you, just turn away from me. That's it, good. They're just going to pull us in.

ANDY

Thank you very much.

CREWMAN IN THE WATER

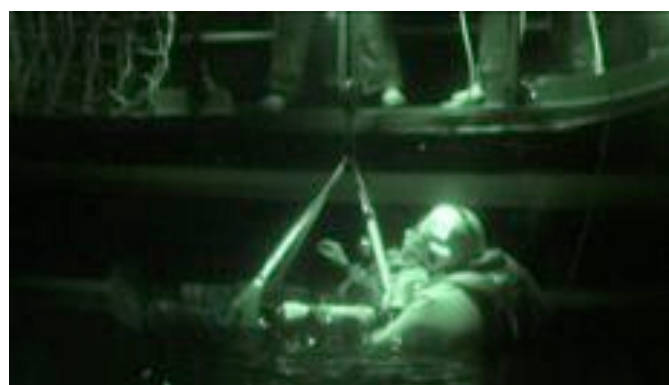
That's it. So what we're going to do now is put a couple of strops around you, OK?

MURTY CAMPBELL

Pull the person in the water to the hoist, and the hoist assists us to get the person on board. Because even a light-ish person can be quite heavy in the water.

CREWMAN IN THE WATER

We'll put this one underneath your arms.



MURTY CAMPBELL

We use the two strops because of post-rescue collapse. You're lifting somebody out of the sea, they've been cold in the water for that time and the water pressure on them. As soon as you lift them out of the water all the blood rushes down-the-way and takes blood away from the vital organs. And it can cause heart attack.

OK, once you get him in if you can get that first kayak out of the water. OK, somebody gets the boathook and hooks the deck line.

Saving kayakers is the priority because our job is to save lives at sea, not save equipment. So it's coxswain's discretion whether a kayak is taken on-board or not. When there is two other kayakers missing you wouldn't waste time hauling a couple of kayaks on board. If it was difficult to get them on board you would get these poor people on board and head straight to search for the other pair.

OK once the kayak's clear get Chegs out of the water. Sir was there anybody else with you?

GORDON

Yes there is another two have gone off to look for our paddles that we dropped.

MURTY CAMPBELL

Any idea which direction they went?

GORDON

We've been blown down-wind, so they started paddling back into the wind. So they'll be back wherever the wind is coming from now. They'll be back over that area somewhere.

MURTY CAMPBELL

How many is there?

GORDON

There's two more.

MURTY CAMPBELL

Are they quite good paddlers?

GORDON

Yeah, they're quite well equipped. They don't have a VHF radio with them but they do have some other bits and pieces and enough to stay warm ashore. And they've got some lights and stuff like that as well. If they're ashore, we will be able to see them.



SIMON

*Andy, tell me, how did that feel, the whole procedure?*

ANDY

There's quite a lot of sitting waiting, and in that time while we were waiting core temperature is dropping quite fast. And you're trying to keep in a posture where you're maintaining your heat, your body heat. But nevertheless, you are aware you're getting quite cold. The final immersion on the way back in, pretty much ice-cream cold shock to the body. So suddenly lots of shivering. Very aware of needing to get warm.

GORDON

It was a good feeling when you could actually see it changing and coming towards us. We could see both the port and the starboard hand mark as well, that was really good. SIMON You imagine if this was for real, you'd be very... GORDON You've be very happy, yeah. I was so happy when I saw it, when I let go of Andy's boat I almost fell in!

COASTGUARD RESCUE OFFICER

OK, we're all agreed we'll check out the wee bay that's down behind us. There might be somebody hiding in there. OK?

SIMON

*The coastguard rescue officers now know two kayakers have been recovered, but two others are missing, possibly sheltering on an inaccessible beach. The shore team will search the*

*cliffs from above. Meanwhile, the Lifeboat launches it's Y-boat, a smaller vessel which can reach shores too shallow for the main Lifeboat.*

#### MURTY CAMPBELL

There's a lot of situations kayakers get themselves into that shouldn't really be happening. A lot of it is probably due to people just taking to the water and not going through a, sort-of, good club structure, or training, yeah. Taking them out in challenging conditions when they start to get happy with it, build up to it and just get used to the conditions. And just knowing what the sea can do. And it does keep you out of trouble.

#### SIMON

*Our missing kayakers, Mike and Liz, are making themselves as visible as possible, although even with night vision it's hard to see. They've turned the white hulls of their kayaks upwards, one pointing out to sea. They're using a strobe, a laser flare, and what surprised us all in its effectiveness, a flashing red bicycle light.*



The y-boat crew search a series of small inlets guided by the shore team and main Lifeboat. When they find the right one, it's obvious.

#### CREWMAN ON RADIO

We've got the two sea kayakers here on the beach, they're fit and well, they say there's just the two of them there's no other people. So what we'll do is we'll take them back in the y-boat to the Lifeboat, over. Roger, that's all copied – standing by for your return.



#### SIMON

*Their kayaks are left on the beach. Names and address are inside the kayaks, to prevent rescue services being called out on false alarm if someone discovers them and fears a kayaker might have been swept out to sea. If you have to climb onto a Lifeboat, they'll probably lower a scramble net to make it easier.*

*That seemed to go smoothly.*

MURTY CAMPBELL

It did that.

*SIMON*

*The exercise is over, but on the way to harbor, Murty notices two of our kayaking cameramen. It's hard to see on video, but the one with reflective tape all around his kayak and paddle, is clearly visible in the lifeboat's searchlight. We can't even see the other kayaker.*

MURTY CAMPBELL

When you swing the searchlight round on somebody who's got reflective gear on, and that's the difference. Five pounds worth of reflective strip could save your life.



*SIMON*

*We should emphasize our team made deliberate mistakes. Andy and Gordon should have worn hats and put on extra warm clothing including storm cags. They could have been towed to safety, and in reality, both had split paddles hidden in their hatches. Some countries list minimum safety equipment sea kayakers must carry, including foghorns, flares and high visibility jackets, so always check.*

*The following morning, as we debrief the night's exercise, both Gordon and Murty have learnt a great deal.*



MURTY CAMPBELL

I'm not that visible myself when I'm there. And I'm going to get myself some reflective gear for my boat. And get a new light-stick up and running. You know when you've been doing it for long enough you forget yourself and you just get lax. So it's a good learning point for me.

GORDON

Especially when you're seen as the person at the top and the one everyone looks to. Then you tend to tone down what you have, and we shouldn't, we should always be right at the top and beyond what everyone else is thinking. I didn't realize how cold I would get and how debilitated I was. Here's hoping the hands work enough for this. By the time it came to set

off the flare, my hands weren't working, because I'd been holding onto his deck-line and his cockpit so that he could keep warm and when we came to send the flare, my hand was really cold.

MURTY CAMPBELL

Last night brings it home to you – it could be myself in the water and I have to give myself every chance as well.

GORDON

It wouldn't look evry good if you were rescued by your own Lifeboat Murty!

MURTY CAMPBELL

No that's true.

SIMON

*You would never, ever live that down. Your bleeper would be going off!*

MURTY CAMPBELL

The local club here have been warned.

SIMON

*That got us thinking - what do the other kayakers from the emergency services carry when they go paddling?*



ANNE YOUNG

In this pocket I have the PLB for alerting. Just in there, nice and handy, easy to access. Keep that zipped up. Then I've got the VHF, this one is the one with digital selective calling so the little red button is just underneath here, it's carefully covered so you can't do it accidentally. All I'd have to do is hold that down for five seconds, that would send my position and tell people I'm in distress. That's that. And then on this side here, in this pocket, I've got the things that are going to pinpoint where I am. I have alternatives. So I've got a laser flare – that would be just used to highlight where I am once I knew people were coming. And if for some reason that didn't work, or I wanted it, I have a day-night. One end is a red hand-held and the other end is an orange smoke that can be used to pinpoint where I am in the daytime. And that's most of what I carry. I like the VHF because I can talk to people on it and they know where I am.



#### ALUN TINK

OK, this is my bag of tricks that I carry when I'm kayaking. This is my emergency bag. When I go kayaking I have a parachute red flare with me. I also additionally have a hand-held red flare. Most importantly, and probably most valuably, is a 406 personal locator beacon. This one is registered in my name and it's registered as someone who kayaks and also hill walks, and it also includes emergency contact numbers as well. Other bits of kit I have... This is normally on my buoyancy jacket, it's a whistle. Not so good with helicopters but very, very good with surface vessels if they're looking for you, particularly at night. Another item I'll have on my buoyancy aid is a flashing strobe. Once the strobe is activated, it gives a nice bright flashing light which is a real attention getter for anybody who is looking for something, particularly during the night and also during the day, during the darker days.

There's quite a lot of stuff in here, it might take a while to go through it. One of the other things I carry with me is a waterproof hand-held GPS and that's in addition to any maps I have. In addition to this we have some basic first aid kit, we have a small towel... it's very important when you get wet in the water you have spare dry clothes to wear. A small towel like that, you can dry yourself down, get yourself warm again. Some hand-warmers; obviously with your hands in the water you can get quite cold so I carry some hand warmers. It's important to remember that when you do get hypothermic the first thing that starts to happen is you lose the feelings in your hands and also your toes – you lose the feelings in the extremities such as your hands and feet. So it's important to keep those warm. Because if you can't use your hands you can't grasp onto a line, you can't activate a beacon, you can't activate your radio. So that's why I carry some hand warmers.

Some tape for repairing my kayak if it was to get holed. A spare compass which I carry on my buoyancy aid – there's a lot in here! A couple of cheap space blankets so that you can keep people warm if you were to get them to the coast – wind chill can be a big factor. And in addition to that I carry a survival bag. Now, if somebody does go into the water and they get wet and you can get them to the coast, get them nice and dry, get them in dry clothes, and then get them into a survival bag. Wind chill can be a big issue here, so if you can keep them out of the wind in a nice big bag like that they'll stay nice and warm.



#### SIMON

*We said at the start sea kayaking is all about being self-reliant. Once you are, you can enjoy your sea kayaking even more. We shot most of this film off the coast of Lewis in the Outer Hebrides, and we made time for plenty of paddling, including rounding the exposed Butt of Lewis. Calum, who shot most the on the water sequences seems pleased.*



*The co-author of the guidebook to the Outer Hebrides helped with our locations, and we discovered another paddler who can work a camera. Three different helicopter crews kept us safe. While the crew of the lifeboat in Stornoway tolerated our ever changing schedule, as did their colleagues in Portree on the Isle of Skye. Where we discovered yet another, camera person to help with our shoot.*

Which couldn't have happened without the entire coastguard team. They'd be grateful if UK based kayakers would download the free short video from [SeaKayakwithGordonBrown.com](http://SeaKayakwithGordonBrown.com) for additional UK specific advice.

*Once again we've used Werner Paddles, Valley sea kayaks, and Reed Chillcheater clothing and equipment. Yet this has not been a typical coaching film. Our emphasis has been to show you how a rescue works. It doesn't matter where in the world you are kayaking, what rescue services there are or how they operate. For kayakers, the key points are exactly the same.*



GORDON

So I hope you enjoy your kayaking. I hope the worst doesn't happen. But if it does, you'll be better prepared to help yourself.

For expert coaching contact Gordon Brown at [SkyakAdventures.com](http://SkyakAdventures.com)



