



# letters

## A lifeboat solution?

Lifeboats have always formed an integral part of vessels' lifesaving appliances. My mind goes back to the days of wooden boats, radial davits, manila rope three fold falls rove through 'clump' blocks, sails, oars, 'hard tack' biscuits, tanks of water, condensed milk, bailers and buckets and other paraphernalia. These vessels and boats were manned by proud, professional seamen who took a pride in their profession and their ability to live in comfort with the sea and the problems they would encounter on a voyage.

Now here we are inundated with very large vessels plying the seas and oceans of accountants and commercial people inundating and stifling any thought or independent views. Legislation was brought in requiring lifeboats to be launched using what is confusedly termed 'on-load hooks'.

These hooks are inherently dangerous, and such danger has been demonstrated in reports, pictures and discussions over a long period. Various designs have been tried in order to comply with the existing rules and regulations relating to lifeboat launching: I am told that there are something like 100 different designs being evaluated at present. By whom or where is uncertain, but one thing is sure: those 100 designs will still be based on the unchanged legislation that is currently in force.

What I am about to propose does not comply with legislation laid down by IMO or contained within the latest Solas agreement, as it is not designed as an 'on load' hook but acts as a positive release when assisted by the buoyancy of the boat itself. The fact that it does not comply with the latest Solas agreements may be an issue but instead of carrying on killing seafarers at what appears to be an increasing rate, should we not consider forcing a change in these rules and regulations?

Reduced manning and, perhaps, a lack of 'seamanship awareness' among today's multinational crews dictate that equipment – particularly that to be used in emergency conditions – must be simple and foolproof, needing minimum maintenance and with a modus operandi that is easily understood.

Comments/suggestions would be welcome, and I point out that I have no commercial interest in this – only the safety of crew and passengers.

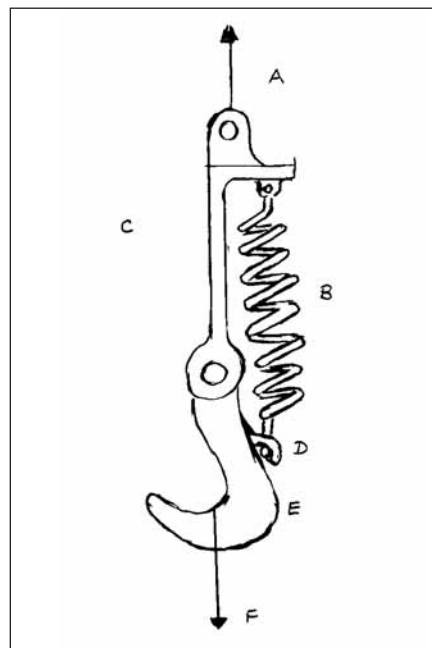
It is a simplified concept – the outcome of several years of thought and discussion. In presenting this concept it is important to stress that the details are not definitive and the drawings are not to scale.

Ideally, the fittings should be of alloy steel (of the approved calculated strength and dimensions). Construction should be of a 'tight fit' design obviating the need for a machine finish and affording ease of maintenance and facilitating visual examination.

### Operational description

Figure no 1 shows the status of the system when the lifeboat is resting in its chocks through to the time it is lifted from the chocks, lifted outboard, manned and then lowered to the water. The spring 'B' is in tension all the time, kept that way by the imposed weight of boat, crew and passengers.

Immediately the boat becomes

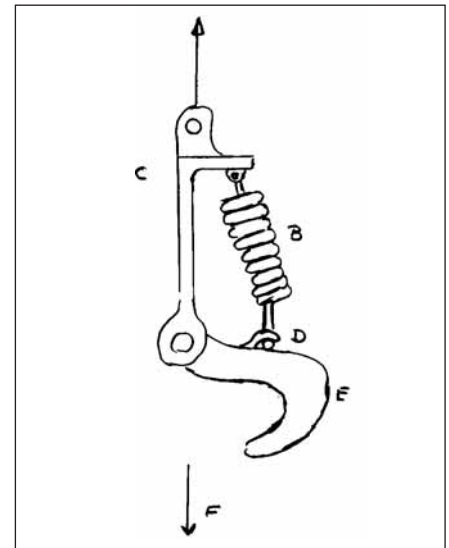


▲ Figure 1: Load of lifeboat on hook  
 A Davit fall attachment  
 B Spring of approved load-bearing design value  
 C Body of lifting device  
 D Clevis hook for spring attachment  
 E Main swivel type lifting hook  
 F Vertical direction of load.

waterborne the weight on the hook is reduced by the buoyancy factor of the boat.

With the spring no longer under tension it retracts and the hook assumes the attitude shown in Figure 2. The boat is now clear of the falls and is independent of the mother vessel. To recover the boat, the spring is detached from the hook by simply unhooking from the clevis 'D' which allows it to hang vertically again ready for re-connection to the boat.

Once the boat is re-stowed in its chocks the spring 'B' can easily be reconnected to clevis 'D'.



▲ Figure 2: Lifeboat buoyant; load released from hook

### Maintenance

Operation is, I submit, uncomplicated and immediately apparent. The whole system is virtually maintenance free and does not require human intervention for operation. All parts should be of alloy steel of adequate strength with approved safety factors applied to all parts commensurate with the safety factors for the davits and falls.

There are no parts in the system that should require type approval from any classification society or approval body. Close machine finishes are not required thus removing the need for planned maintenance and unwanted reporting systems.

### Conclusion

In December 2007, the prestigious UK P&I Club drew attention to a study carried out by the United Kingdom's MCA Research

Project 555, which was a study into the safety of davit-mounted, side launching ships' lifeboats and their launching systems. The primary objective of the study was to make proposals for measures to improve the hardware performance of lifeboats and contribute to the prevention of accidents. [See pp 6-7: Editor]

Based upon the foregoing I commend my proposal to your professional attention and would welcome comment. Almost certainly, what is proposed does not comply with current legislation (the 'failed' legislation) but I submit that its adoption will put an end to the slaughter of seafarers resulting from their being compelled to use unsafe equipment.

**Captain Peter Donoclift FNI, Alicante,  
Spain**