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Specialization

Salvors are renowned for their training and expertise, no matter what the situation. They proved it again this year with the *M/V Dali*.

BY PATRICK ZEITLER

FROM THE FRANCIS SCOTT KEY BRIDGE ALLISION in Baltimore to Houthi attacks on Red Sea shipping, it's been a busy year for the global salvage industry. In addition to those headline events, the volume of shipboard fires has increased as well as the need for spill response.

The response to the *MV Dali* allision and collapse of the Francis Scott Key (FSK) Bridge was a good example. Companies like Resolve, Donjon, SMIT, Witt O'Brien's and Randive – all of whom were involved – understand that advanced shipboard firefighting, marine spill management and marine salvage require training and expertise that's specific to the unique variables associated with the marine and shipboard environments.

2024 has been a busy year and one that has tested the technical expertise of everyone from the salvors and emergency management contractors to regulators like the U.S. Coast Guard.

USCG

USCG Incident Managers have recognized significant variances in salvage operations with respect to cost, safety practices, operational efficiency and cognizance of “optics” while working through politically sensitive operations. The USCG itself is making a strong effort to design a program framework that will enable local port managers to stand up critical assets based on their port specifications – a tough task in an industry defined by its seemingly infinite variables.

Logistics experts within state agencies typically quote sayings like “Lieutenants study tactics while



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Skills



PHOTO BY NTSBGOV.

generals study logistics,” and in the case of emergency management this is a hard truth.

In October 2023, the USCG published its new Area Contingency Plan (ACP) for coastal zones, the first major overhaul of the ACP structure in 25 years. ACP is the administrative mechanism used to standardize and bolster capacity for marine firefighting and salvage in every USCG Captain of the Port Zone.

Additionally, in January of 2024 the USCG National Salvage & Marine Firefighting (SMFF) Task Force was established as a way to further support the goals of the ACP.

The SMFF Task Force is comprised of 84 members representing Coast Guard planning staff, marine response industry and port stakeholders throughout the U.S. It’s already identified several gaps that could potentially leave U.S. ports unprepared to adequately respond in the event of a maritime emergency. The gaps appear in the training of marine firefighters, lack of SMFF resources and limited capital required for equipment maintenance and personnel training.

The SMFF Task Force just completed the outline framework for the first national Marine Firefighting Plan Handbook/Template, which it intends to distribute as a planning tool to each of the SMFF Subcommittees in early 2025. The USCG Public Affairs office states that “The partnerships we are building between federal, state, local and industry partners will no doubt save

lives in the future and protect America’s ports, economy and security.”

For inquiries on how to get involved with the National Salvage & Marine Firefighting Task Force, you can reach out to its point of contact at Michael.J.Goglia@uscg.mil.

RESOLVE MARINE

Resolve Marine is a USCG SMFF task force provider and brings specialized skills and equipment to ensure clients comply with OPA 90 regulations.

Three decades ago, Resolve established the Resolve Academy to provide USCG approved courses for marine skills such as firefighting, damage control and basic entry level mariner courses. Today, the Resolve Academy has become a Texas A&M Extension Service Cooperative Learning Center featuring a course for “Land based Firefighters Responding to Marine Vessel Fires.”

This year is a textbook example of how Resolve puts the practice of advanced training into play.

It began as a good salvage year with a slightly higher volume of vessel removals and a large number of ship-board fire responses. Then the allision of the M/V *Dali* with the FSK Bridge. As part of the M/V *Dali*’s vessel response plan, Resolve was designated the primary salvor. Its charge was to disentangle the M/V *Dali* from the FSK Bridge, refloat the vessel and tow it to an available shipyard.

Resolve CEO Joe Farrell III commented, “No job is the same, but they do start to rhyme over time,” a saying that shows how experienced salvors learn from the variables encountered in each project. Most think this applies at the operational deck plate level, but Farrell is applying this logic to the corporate level too. In a feast-or-famine industry, he aims to maintain staff at all levels within the company and optimize training, mentoring and advancement opportunities for all employees.

This is where the specialized training came into play. From the bow of the M/V *Dali*, Resolve salvors removed nearly two hundred shipping containers as well as sections of the bridge. With 55 containers holding various types of hazardous materials and the unstable nature of the damage, much of the rigging had to be performed with salvors wearing full Class A HazMat suits and fall protection with rope access.

The response to the M/V *Dali* has been the highest profile response for Resolve in 2024 and the most impactful. The vessel was towed from the channel within 55 days of the allision – a remarkable testament to the ingenuity and training of the salvors, engineers, firefighters, resource partners and specialized contractors such as demolition experts.

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DONJON MARINE & RANDIVE

John Witte, CEO and third-generation owner of Donjon Marine, has not spent much time in the office this year. Indeed, there are no idle hands at Donjon. From the CEO to the junior members of the salvage teams, everyone is on the move.

Much like Resolve, the year started busy, and when the *Dali* allision occurred Donjon responded with the *Chesapeake 1000*, the largest heavy lift asset on the East Coast. Donjon’s role was to remove debris and clear the channel. To



PHOTO BY MARYLAND GOVPICS: CHESAPEAKE 1000.

do this, it enlisted the help of subsea specialist Randive.

Randive was founded in 1959 by Randy Erlandson, who originally operated out of the basement of his home in Brooklyn, New York. Over the past six decades, it's become one of the premier dive contractors in the Northeast, specializing in ship's husbandry and marine salvage and often subcontracting for Donjon.

The multi-generational company is now led by Kurt Erlandson, Randy's son. It didn't hesitate when Donjon requested its assistance with the *Dali*. For seventy-one straight days, the dive team performed without incident or injury.

"We wish to extend our sincere gratitude to work with true professionals such as Donjon Marine and others in the successful and safe completion of a salvage operation of this magnitude," Erlandson stated.

SMIT SALVAGE

SMIT Salvage, the Dutch-owned salvor, is partnered with Donjon Marine in an OPA 90 service. The joint venture, Donjon-SMIT, is based



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in Houston and always seems to have something going on.

If Guillermo Hernandez, the OPA 90 Program Manager at Donjon-Smit, is not responding to actual events, he and the team will be participating in drills or engaging with colleagues on various safety committees, including the USCG's SMFF Task Force.

The SMIT-Donjon partnership has set the global standard for what a team with unified goals can accomplish. It recognizes the specialties in each salvage discipline and disperses the necessary talent and equipment according to the need.

This year's responses have included ships under attack in the Red Sea, bridge collisions (several besides the *Dali* incident), as well as a multitude of shipboard fires and oil spills. The team was recognized in 2024 by earning the prestigious North American Marine

Estimates vary, but what's not disputed is the timely execution of this response significantly mitigated what could have been a catastrophic economic impact. The Port of Baltimore ranks in the top ten of U.S. ports in terms of both international tonnage and dollar value. Witt O'Brien's/Ambipar Response understood the situation and that a favorable outcome could only be accomplished by successful coordination of the myriad resources available and efficient collaboration within the Incident Command Structure.

Environment Protection Association (NAMEPA) Maritime Sustainability Passport seal.

WITT O'BRIEN'S/AMBIPAR RESPONSE

Large-scale salvage operations don't happen without structured organization, and everyone in the marine response industry knows about the Witt O'Brien's/

Ambipar Response team and what it contributes to the Incident Command Structure.

With offices in Houston, London, Singapore and Brazil, Witt O'Brien's is well situated to facilitate the coordination of emergency responses anywhere in the world. The *Dali* allision was a shining example of the way in which the Witt O'Brien's/Ambipar Response team operates.

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By every measure, the response was successful. The Port of Baltimore was fully reopened and restoration of the shipping channel occurred within 60 days. This greatly reduced concerns of global logistic backlogs and local economic impact. The salvage industry, once again, rose to the occasion.

MarEx

Commercial diver **PAT ZEITLER** is Director of Business Development & Program Advancement at The Ocean Corporation in Houston.