

Fishermen fight on for lost friends

Scots Man 4/11/90

ALEC GILLIES looked out yesterday across the cold, grey Clyde water that had claimed the life of his long-time friend, Jamie Russell, skipper of the sunken fishing boat Antares. After a moment, he said: "I lost a workmate and a very good friend."

As the Clyde fishing community grieves for the sunken Antares crew, Chris Cessford and Alan Dron speak to their colleagues and families, who are campaigning to make the water safer

As we sailed out from Gourock across the firth towards the Navy submarine base at Faslane, he went on: "We have struck up this campaign to get it sorted out so the boys' lives were not lost in vain. We will make sure it never happens again."

As campaign co-ordinator, Mr Gillies, 33, a fisherman for 19 years, is making plans for a possible blockade of Faslane by fishing boats if talks with defence officials in London tomorrow and on Friday fail to halt underwater submarine exercises in the Clyde.

Mr Russell, his 55ft trawler and three-man crew disappeared after the Antares's fishing gear was snagged by the submerged submarine Trenchant.

A salvage operation is going on around the clock to retrieve the wreck of the Antares from the Arran Trench, one of the deepest parts of the Clyde, off Arran. The bodies of the missing men may be trapped inside.

The Clyde fishing community is grieving the loss of the men from Carradale in Kintyre. Their sense of loss, says Mr Gillies, is sharpening the rage and frustration they feel towards the Navy.

The Navy is also facing a confrontation with Greenpeace demonstrators who have arrived in the Clyde to protest at alleged cracks in the reactors of four ageing Polaris submarines.

Alec's mission yesterday was to carry out a reconnaissance mission for a possible blockade of Faslane and the US base at Holy Loch — using the local knowledge of fishing boats the Jeannie Stella and Viking from Gourock.

Standing on the deck of the Jeannie Stella, Mr Gillies vowed lessons would be learnt from the tragedy. A blockade would be a last resort if the talks failed, he said, but there was not a fisherman among the 150 Clyde operators who would not support it, in spite of the cost.

"We will be there as long as

it takes," he said. "It's lives we are talking about, not money."

A police launch cruised alongside the Jeannie Stella and the Viking, as the reconnaissance party swept by the US naval base at Holy Loch.

Mr Russell's brother-in-law, Alastair McMillan, watched as the Jeannie Stella passed a submarine cruising on the surface. Of the family tragedy he said: "It will be years before we get over this."

A fisherman for 32 years, Mr McMillan also works out of Carradale. The fleet, he said, is worried — especially now. After years of near-misses, the tragedy was bound to happen, he said. "We think they are using us as target practice."

The submarines hid among the fishing boats, he added. "There's plenty of room for them to keep clear of us. It's a hard enough life without this."

Women from west coast fishing families hope to mount a peaceful demonstration

outside the main gates of the Clyde submarine base on Thursday to support their menfolk's call for keeping submarines in the Firth of Clyde away from trawlers.

A protest meeting was due to be held last night at Carradale, home of three of the four Antares crewmen. One of the organisers, Shelagh Galbraith, said it was hoped to attract every woman in the village.

"We feel we should do something, and this is one way of showing the women of the village are completely behind the men. Following disasters, it's the women and their children who are left behind."

Mrs Galbraith, whose husband John's boat partnered the ill-fated Antares on fishing trips all last summer, added: "This isn't an issue that's going to go away. It could be my husband next."

She added there was concern that the arrival of groups such as Greenpeace could divert attention from their campaign to keep trawlers and submarines apart.

It is hoped that Thursday's demonstration will attract wives and mothers of fishermen from Campbeltown, Tarbert, and the Ayrshire coast. They hope to see the base commander.



Alec Gillies: We will make sure it never happens again

There were further delays yesterday in retrieving the Antares from the Arran Trench.

The replacement for the malfunctioning Scorpio robot vehicle is less well-suited to cutting away debris from around the trawler. In addition, a cable fitted round the trawler snapped when an attempt was made to lift her. It is now likely to be towards the end of the week before she can be raised.

After Sunday night's incident when members of Greenpeace in inflatable boats harassed the Polaris submarine HMS Revenge near her Gare Loch base, the environmental pressure group's converted tug was last night standing by to confront the Revenge's sister submarine HMS Resolution, which was expected to be returning to the Clyde submarine base.