



Photo: Heather Crockett, Henry Abram & Sons

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Royal Navy on tow

The 'Esvagt Connector' on tow duty for the Royal Navy's coming flagship.

When the aircraft carrier, the 'HMS Prince of Wales', leaves dock in 2018 it will be as flagship for the British Royal Navy.

The vessel will be the largest and most advanced warship ever built in Great Britain. It is being built in modules that will be assembled at the Rosyth shipyard on the east coast of Scotland. Some modules are being built in other harbours, giving ESVAGT a somewhat unusual towing operation.

The advanced technical systems on board the aircraft carrier will be controlled from two bridge towers. These towers are being built at a shipyard in Glasgow, which is situated on the west coast of Scotland. The shipyards are only about an hour and a half away from each other by road – but when you have a 750 ton aircraft carrier module to transport, you have to take the sea route using a barge. ESVAGT won the towing charter with the 'Esvagt Connector'.

“The starting point for the towing operation was that we took the shorter, northern route,” says Captain Henrik Pedersen, who sailed the 'Esvagt Connector' from Esbjerg to Scotland to prepare for the operation:

“A storm raged for several days on the way over and the heavy weather that we had hit head on continued when we arrived,” he says.

Weather as an opponent

The weather forecast made a towing operation via the north route impossible. After eight days where the 'Esvagt Connector' lay ready but was kept in port by the weather, it was decided that we would take the southern route instead.

“It was twice as long, approximately 1,200 nautical miles but we avoided the worst of the storms,” says Henrik Pedersen.

The barge with the module for the ship was then towed out of the bay by two tugs and handed over to the 'Esvagt Connector' in the bay.

In the meantime, the weather continued to call the shots.

“It turned into one of those trips where you realise that weather forecasts are not always accurate. We reached the Irish Sea and set course towards Land's End with the promise of a moderate breeze – but soon we were in the middle of moderate gale with waves of 6-7 metres,” says Henrik Pedersen.

With no chance of shelter, the 'Esvagt Connector' had to turn the barge into the swell with extra wire and sit tight.

“12 hours passed before the wind and swell had subsided enough for us to continue. That is a long time and many long hours when you are responsible

for a cargo like that,” says Henrik Pedersen.

The rest of the journey was less eventful. The English Channel with its heavy traffic brought with it low water depths so the wire length was constantly monitored to avoid scraping the bottom.

After arriving safe and well on the east side of Scotland, the wind decided to make an encore.

“We arrived at our agreed destination where the barge was to be handed over to the tugs to make the final entry in to Rosyth when the wind picked up again. The wind plus a damaged winch on the barge meant a change of plan was needed, so we towed the barge out again and waited two days for better weather and for a repair man,” says Henrik Pedersen.

Great trust

On Sunday the 20th of December, the ‘Esvagt Connector’ finally handed over the barge to the customer – after seven days of waiting, 10 days of towing and unending windy weather.

It was an exciting operation with a fierce opponent – the wind – and a welcome ally in the form of the Aircraft Carrier Alliance; the consortium behind the new aircraft carrier.

“They showed us a great deal of trust throughout the whole process,” says Jens Bagger, chartering manager at ESVAGT:

”Henrik was an active participant in the daily weather meetings and the cooperation was excellent during the planning of the operation. We are sure that the successful towing operation will be a positive contribution to ESVAGT’s reputation,” he says.

The crew on board the ‘Esvagt Connector’ would also like to give their thanks for the cooperation, in particular to Heather Crockett and Jonathan Fettis from Henry Abram & Sons for their help with everything and for making them feel so very welcome in Glasgow.

ESVAGT is a dedicated provider of safety and support at sea, founded on an experienced and well-trained offshore crew and unmatched rescue capabilities.

We support the offshore Oil & Gas industries with a wide range of specialized services: Standby, Emergency Response and Rescue Vessels (ERRV), Oil spill response, Firefighting, Tanker assists, Rig moves, Supply services and Interfield transfer of cargo and personnel.

In 2010, ESVAGT brought the dedicated offshore wind Service Operation Vessels (SOV) to the market. The SOVs provide accommodation for up to 40 technicians, storage for small turbine parts and a workshop, plus personnel and equipment transfer capabilities by either Walk-to-Work gangway system or Safe Transfer Boats.

ESVAGT was founded in 1981 and has a fleet of more than 40 vessels and more than 900 employees on- and offshore.

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