A rescue out at sea with the Electro-Optical System
Loïc is part of the French navy's air-sea search & rescue (SAR) team. More specifically, he's the operator of the latest-generation helicopter, the NH90 Caïman Marine model. Since the helicopter is fitted with Safran’s Electro-Optical Systems (EOS), the team can observe and detect objects such as buoys, mobile phone masts, vessels, or even a human-sized object from several kilometers away, even in the dead of night and during a storm.

Loïc is eating dinner with fellow crew members on call when his cell phone starts ringing. He jumps up as soon as he hears the special ring tone he chose for calls from his helicopter squadron 33F. He's been the operator on several missions, even in extreme weather conditions, thanks to the system's Gyrostabilized Line-of-Sight. It's the system that automatically calculates the flight path needed to scan an entire sector. The operator mainly uses his infrared sensor to detect objects in the infrared band, used to magnify a specific point.

But since the emergency call, they have lost radio contact! The mast falling could have caused a leak, and the ship risks losing its stability. The ship's crew asks a helicopter squadron to attempt a rescue. If the helicopter is able to save the crew's lives, it will mean a success for 2023. Loïc and his crew have that goal in mind, thanks to the system's Continuous Zoom feature, which allows the operator to switch between day and night vision, and fly at extremely low altitudes, without the risk of collision.

Once he arrives at the squadron's base, Loïc gets a quick rundown on the situation from one of the staff members at the regional monitoring and rescue center, while his fellow crew members get the helicopter ready. Yann, Gwendal and Adrien also jump into their car to join the squadron. Yann is the pilot, and Gwendal the co-pilot, also part of the SAR team. They're both experts in flying the NH90 Caïman Marine. Yann is in charge of flying the helicopter, while Gwendal is in charge of all the electronic systems. Adrien is the rescue swimmer for this mission.

Once he arrives at the squadron's base, Loïc sees that the helicopter has been rolled out of its hangar and Yann is already at the controls. Adrien and two mechanics are undertaking final checks. Less then ten minutes later, the crew is ready to take off.

Given the weather conditions, the infrared waveband is the best choice. And this "close-up" removes any doubt. Although Loïc is flying at over 140 knots (161 mph), he can clearly see a person holding onto the boat's overturned hull. He quickly takes a photo of the person, who is waving his arms frantically, asking for help. Loïc has a hot spot in sector 182, range five nautical miles. He's now hoisting the person with the help of the system's Hoisting Operations feature, which allows the helicopter to lift objects weighing up to several hundred kilograms.

The helicopter is now flying over endless waves, and the tension inside is at a peak. The last position sent by the boat was received about 20 minutes ago, from the owner of a sailboat that lost its mast in the Chenal du Four, a channel off the western tip of Brittany, between Le Conquet and Béniguet Island.

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I've got a hot spot in sector 182, range five nautical miles! The waves in this sector are nearly three meters high, and the sailboat is only seven meters long. Loïc quickly asks for details about the color of the boat and the sea and wind conditions. With a Force 5 wind, it's not going to be easy!