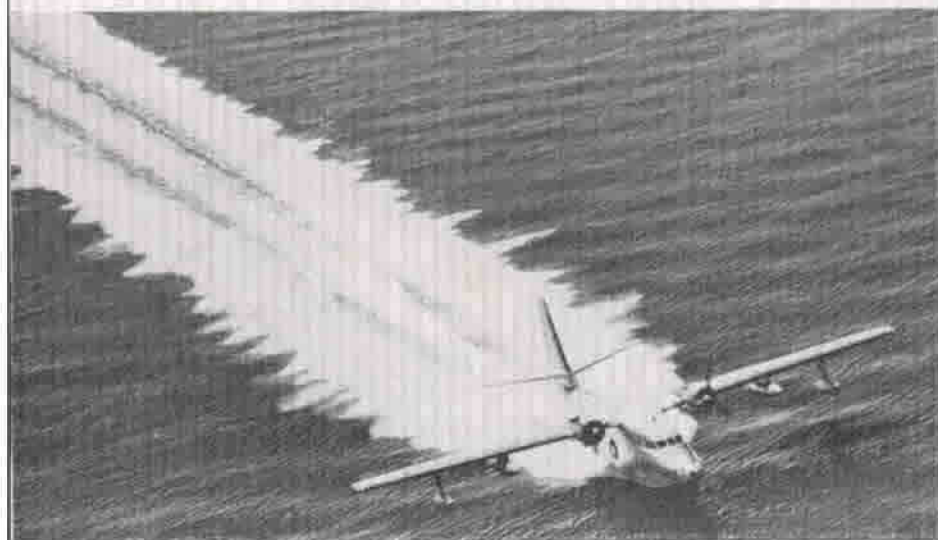


Albatross an 'Old Reliable' in Air Force combat rescue missions



HU-16 Albatross is continuing to prove its effectiveness in air-sea rescues.

When they tabulate feats of heroism for the Vietnam war, look for men of the Air Force Aerospace Rescue & Recovery Service to place high on the list. Apparently they set no limits for themselves in fulfilling their motto: "That Others May Live."

Since the middle of 1964 when the air war against North Vietnam was initiated, these life-savers have been making headlines with daring rescues of downed airmen over land and sea. Flying helicopters and the Grumman Albatross amphibian, these Air Force pilots have been brazenly defying enemy gunners while effecting their rescues.

The Albatross is making its share of the saves, many of them in the Tonkin Gulf within easy range of North Vietnamese shore batteries.

What a welcome sight it must be to have a friendly 'chopper' or Albatross appear on the scene just in time to extricate you from a very dangerous predicament. Just how exciting and timely such a save can be was vividly described in the July issue of Air Force Magazine by Capt. James P. Coyne.

During a strike against the North, an Air Force Phantom, hit by anti-aircraft

fire, made it to the Gulf of Tonkin before its two-man crew ejected. Captain Coyne, circling above with other fighter pilots for protective cover, recorded the scene as an HU-16 Albatross arrived on the scene to pick up the two men.

"... The HU-16 touches down in a shower of white spray and begins to taxi towards the rafts. As it approaches Wylie (1st Lt. Wylie E. Nolan), who is closest to shore, the enemy gunners begin to get the range. Geysers spew from the water on both sides of the aircraft and behind it. Your throat gets dry as you realize what a sitting duck the flying boat is as she churns slowly through the swells. One line of geysers begins to track up the aircraft's wake.

Heavy seas

"At last you see the first raft disappear under a wing. 'We've got one of them, Mustang,' the Rescue Alpha pilot calls, 'but we can't see the other one. Waves are pretty high, and the shelling's getting pretty thick down here.' Just then you see a geyser erupt directly in front of the plane, so close that the spray drenches the cockpit windows. You look back on shore. Where some of the gun



emplacements were hidden there is now blackened wreckage, smoke, and fire, but many of the guns are still firing, and the accuracy of the gunners is improving. Above the guns, the planes roll into their bombing and strafing runs, trying to silence the remaining artillery before the rescue plane is blown out of the water."

From his raft a quarter-mile away, Capt. Jack Gravis, the other downed airman, witnessed the planes attacking the beach as shells whistled in all around him, and from his viewpoint the scene looked "just like a war movie."

Slogging through the heavy seas, the Albatross headed for the remaining man in the water amidst bursting shells and the whoosh of lethal missiles. As the plane reached Captain Gravis, an Air Force frogman on the Albatross jumped into the water to assist him on board.

"You see the ring of explosions tightening around the aircraft as, one by one, the remaining gunners get the range," Captain Coyne wrote. "Then Rescue Alpha starts to move. She gathers speed, and the shells begin to fall behind her. She skips off a wave crest, settles back, skips again, and she's off! . . ."

Flew first in '47

In the numerous rescues turned in by the Air Force rescue team in Vietnam only the names seem to change—many of the situations bear a striking resemblance to the one depicted by Captain Coyne. In those rescues, nearly 300 U.S. airmen have been saved, with the Albatross contributing 60 saves, 44 of them of combat crews, during 1966 alone.

An impressive record, but it's only part of the Albatross story. It began late in 1947. At that time, Joe Louis reigned as the world's heavyweight boxing champion; the Yankees had beaten their cross-town rivals, the Brooklyn Dodgers, in the World Series; Washington analysts were predicting the political demise of Harry Truman in the next Presidential election; and, at Bethpage, the Albatross amphibian made its first flight.

Nineteen years have passed since then . . . seven men have succeeded to the title once held by the mighty Louis; Jackie Robinson and Joe DiMaggio, standouts in the '47 Series, are now installed in baseball's Hall of Fame; Harry Truman has retired to Indepen-

dence, Mo., where his memoirs record his historic upset victory in the '48 elections.

And the Albatross . . . it still carries on!

Designed originally as a utility plane for the U.S. Navy, the Albatross was later adopted by the Navy, Air Force, and Coast Guard for air-sea rescue service. Over 450 of the amphibians have been delivered to the three services and a number of foreign governments.

Impressive record

In the intervening years, the sturdy two-engine craft has ranged the world over, from pole to pole and ocean to ocean compiling an incredible record of air-sea rescues. During the Korean War the Albatross accounted for 122 combat saves and 200 non-combatants . . . six years ago 57 survivors of an airliner crash were picked up in the Pacific by Albatrosses from Clark Air Force Base in the Philippines. . . 13 were snatched from the frigid Atlantic when their plane went down off Greenland . . . and one Albatross taxied survivors of a sea tragedy to safety through 12 miles of heavy seas because the waves were too high to permit a take-off. The list goes on . . . and on . . . and on.

Since the first Albatross flew out of Bethpage, the original model has been improved to offer higher speed, greater range, lower landing speed, and improved single-engine performance. In addition to air-sea rescue work, the Albatross is serving in a number of other capacities, ranging from Anti-Submarine Warfare to transport roles.

And to prove it can still keep up with the youngsters, the Albatross went record hunting just a few years back and when the quest was over, the Air Force, Navy, and Coast Guard had racked up nine world aviation marks in the venerable amphibian.

The Air Force Aerospace Rescue & Recovery Service and the Albatross have been in many tight spots together. Nurtured in peace and tempered in war, their teamwork has earned the well-deserved praise of thousands.

"That Others May Live" is a fitting motto for the Aerospace Rescue & Recovery Service. "Old Reliable" might be a fitting tribute to the Grumman Albatross.