

31st ARS Aids In Rescue At Sea

An extensive air and sea rescue operation incorporating elements of the United States Air Force and Navy resulted in the successful rescue of all four crew members of a Navy E-1B Tracer that had ditched in the open sea, Sept. 22, about 415 nautical miles west of Clark.

An Air Force HU-16 fixed wing amphibious aircraft of the 31st Air Rescue Sq., on a routine flight 100 miles south of the ditching area, intercepted a May-Day call from the Navy E-1B at noon Wednesday. The HU-16 immediately diverted to fly escort for the Navy aircraft which was low on fuel.

The 31st ARS HU-16 spotted the Navy plane at 12:48, two minutes before it ditched. The HU-16 landed on the sea and had all four Navy crewmen aboard 45 minutes after the ditching.

The HU-16, piloted by Capt. Richard Reichardt, was unable to take off because of the sea conditions. The crew and survivors remained on board until early Thursday morning while Air Force HC-97s flew "capping missions" throughout the night keeping the aircraft in sight. Meanwhile, three naval vessels, the aircraft carrier Independence, the destroyer Stoddard and the

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Landing Ship Dock (LSD) were converging on the area.

Early Thursday morning, Col Karol F. Rybos, 31st ARS commander, and a fresh crew were airlifted to the Independence which had arrived at 5 a.m. and was acting as "on the scene commander."

The new crew, consisting of Maj. Kenneth Shook, Capt. Anthony Muehling, and SSgt. Ronald Dunagan, carrying Jet Assisted Take Off (JATO) bottles and new batteries, were transferred from the Independence to the plane by boat and raft. They replaced the original crew of Captain Reichardt, Capt. D. J. Roberson, Lt. D. N. Gardner, SSgt. W. J.

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Reid, A1C D. F. Wood, and Maj. C. J. Gemmel, who was acting as supervisory pilot.

The four survivors were transferred to the Independence at this time.

SSgt. Richard N. Stone, para-rescueman with the original crew, stayed on board the aircraft and helped attach the JATO bottles and install the new batteries. Sergeant Stone had spent much of the night swimming about the aircraft recovering batteries, JATO bottles and drinking water that had been dropped by the circling HC 97s.

Supporting the Air Force planes on the scene were Navy E-1Bs acting as communications relays, and hovering Navy helicopters.

The HU-16 was able to lift-off the sea with the assistance of the JATO bottles and a high-

ly accurate maneuver by the Independence in which the giant carrier made a high-speed 90-degree turn which smoothed out the rough sea around the plane and enabled the HU-16 to take off in the wake of the ship. Another HU-16 was flying overhead coordinating the maneuver from the air.

There was enough fuel left to enable the HU-16 to fly to Hong Kong, the nearest base, for refueling.

The success of the mission was credited by Colonel Rybos to "a nicely meshed operation between the Navy and Air Force—especially the way in which Captain Kennedy, commander of the Independence, executed the high speed smoothing operation which permitted the aircraft to break free."