

DRAMA ON THE HIGH SEAS: THE ARNOLD INCIDENT

Air Force Sergeant Mike McManus, jumpmaster on the HC-130H, stood up and put on his reserve parachute. It was go time. He looked at his fellow Pararescueman, Staff Sergeant Lawrence Wellington, and gave him a thumbs up. Wellington, arrayed in a wetsuit and SCUBA gear and wearing a parachute, nodded in acknowledgment. McManus stuck his head out the open door of the airplane once more and then jumped into the darkness and into history, the first "PJ" ever to make a night SCUBA jump. Wellington followed immediately behind. Their mission: to save the life of a spy ship's captain.

Waterfront observers and officials at the Port of Mobile knew Captain Joseph M. Castro as "a good man but prone to bad luck." Master of the missile tracking ship USNS GENERAL H.H. ARNOLD (T-AGM-9), Castro had seen more than his share of misfortune.

Castro was a former Navy commander who, prior to assuming command of the ARNOLD, was employed by the Alcoa Steamship Company in Mobile. Castro was captain of the ALCOA CORSAIR when she sailed from New Orleans for San Juan, Puerto Rico, late on the evening of Friday, Oct. 21, 1960. On board were 51 passengers and a crew of 99. One of the passengers on the CORSAIR, Mrs. Clifford R. Davidson, of Pasadena, California, later recalled hearing two blasts of the ship's horn and then an alarm just before hearing what another passenger described as "a terrible crash." In patchy fog, the 455-foot CORSAIR had collided with the 3,796-ton Italian freighter LORENZO MARCELLO near Buras, Louisiana, about 50 miles south of New Orleans. Five passengers and five crewmen were killed on board the CORSAIR. The ship suffered a jagged gash just forward of amidships on her starboard side, exposing and crushing eight staterooms and a large section of the crew's quarters. In addition to the dead, 20 people were injured in the collision. Castro beached the badly crippled ship to prevent her sinking and sent out an emergency call for ambulances and stretchers.

Less than four months later, Castro was in command of the ALCOA PIONEER when the 6,759-ton vessel collided with the LAUST MAERSK in Tokyo Bay on Feb. 5, 1961. The latter, less than three years old, was bound for Yokohama from Los Angeles when she collided with the PIONEER. The Maersk ship went to the bottom with the loss of five



» A crew member on the USNS GENERAL H.H. ARNOLD (T-AGM-9) shot the ship's master, Capt. Joseph M Castro, on Nov. 4, 1967, as the ship steamed more than 500 miles east of Japan.

crewmen. Forty-three crew members and four American passengers on the Danish merchantman were rescued. None of the 43 crewmen on the ALCOA PIONEER were injured. Castro was not implicated in either of the fatal collisions.

In 1963, the ALCOA PLANTER caught fire and burned while berthed at Bremerhaven. Castro was first mate on the PLANTER at the time of the fire but was on shore when the blaze started.

Captain Castro, who lived in the Westlawn area of Mobile, later found employment with the Military Sea Transportation Service (today's Military Sealift Command) and by 1967 was in command of the GENERAL H.H. ARNOLD. Euphemistically referred to as "a satellite tracking ship" at the time, the ARNOLD was a "missile range instrumentation ship," whose mission set included spying on and tracking Soviet missile launches.

Laid down in 1943 and launched in April 1944, the ARNOLD had begun life as a troop transport. Commissioned on Aug. 17, 1944, as the USS GENERAL R.E. CALLAN (AP-139), the vessel served as a transport ship in both the



Asia-Pacific and the Europe-Africa-Middle East Theaters of Operation during World War II. Over the next few years, the CALLAN served variously as a vessel for the U.S. Army Transportation Service, the Military Sea Transportation Service and the U.S. Air Force as a missile tracking ship before being recommissioned as the USNS GENERAL H.H. ARNOLD in 1964. The ship measured 522' 10" overall, with a beam of 71 1/2'. In her configuration as a missile range instrumentation ship, the ARNOLD was equipped with several large radar dishes for tracking the launches and telemetry of missiles.

Before beginning her operations in the Pacific in 1967, the ARNOLD was placed in dry dock in Portland, Oregon, for a refit, but the ship seemed cursed from the start. Elmer "Butch" Harbaugh of Mobile, who was an RCA electronic navigation technician on the ship at the time (tracking operations were run by RCA and Pan Am), recalled the night that a drunk crewman went on a rampage, shooting up the crew's lounge. Another technician named Doug Price reportedly knocked out the shooter with a single punch.

After departing Portland, the ARNOLD sailed south along the California coast to check her newly-installed Decca Navigator System, which made use of radio signals from fixed navigational beacons to determine the ship's position. Satisfied that the new equipment was working properly, Captain Castro set a course for Pearl Harbor. En route, a boiler blew, and the ship drifted helplessly in the Pacific for a week before a powerful tug arrived and towed the lifeless ship into Hawaii for repairs. According to Harbaugh, given that the ship had just come out of dry dock, there was speculation at the time that the ARNOLD had been sabotaged.

Repairs made, the ARNOLD departed Hawaii to track a Soviet missile launch and soon found herself shadowed by three Soviet naval vessels sent to keep tabs on the spy ship while also tracking their own missile. Sometime later, as the ship steamed approximately 525 miles east of Tokyo



on the evening of Nov. 4, Harbaugh and a few other crew members were in the galley when an

announcement came over the intercom, warning of shots fired and instructing the crew to take shelter. Harbaugh and those with him retreated to a large conference room next door, dogging down the door behind them.

A ship's electrician, later identified as Howard G. Rugeles, apparently had smuggled a sidearm on board the ship. Initial reports suggested that Rugeles was experiencing domestic problems; another report said that the man "went berserk." Harbaugh thought that Rugeles may have had some sort of pay problem and had gone looking for the paymaster but had found the captain instead. Whatever the case, Rugeles confronted Captain Castro with a pistol. The 56-year-old Castro put up his hand in a defensive move as Rugeles fired twice, hitting Castro in the hand and chest.

Rugeles tossed the pistol overboard before he was apprehended by fellow crewmen, who then locked the shooter in a cabin. Meanwhile, the ARNOLD's radio operator sent out an emergency request for assistance. Castro was unconscious and losing blood. The ship had no medical officer, but there was a former Navy corpsman on board who did what he could to stanch the bleeding and make the captain comfortable. When it was discovered that there were no friendly ships within a 200 mile radius, the crew of the ARNOLD turned to the Air Force for help and contacted the Fifth Air Force Rescue Station.

The ship's call for help was coordinated through the Joint Rescue Control Center at Fuchu Air Station in Japan and forwarded to the 36th Aerospace Rescue and Recovery Squadron at Tachikawa Air Base.

Retired Air Force Pararescueman Mike McManus recently recalled that he and then-Staff Sergeant Lawrence



» This air base newspaper photo depicts the 36th Aerospace Rescue and Recovery Squadron crew of the aircraft that flew to the rescue of the wounded captain. Kneeling (from left) Staff Sgt. Lawrence Wellington, Flight Surgeon Capt. Neal Gray, and Sgt. Michael McManus. Standing (from left) are Capt. Eric Palmer, Capt. Francis McNutt, Technical Sgt. David Theurer, Technical Sgt. Floyd England, Capt. Kenson Vance, Sgt. John Stephens and Technical Sgt. Donald Davis.

Wellington “were on alert that night and got tasked to go out.” Even though Wellington was senior to McManus, the latter was qualified as an instructor and jumpmaster and therefore in charge of the rescue mission. “Larry had just come out of medical ‘school,’” McManus said, “and that was a good thing.”

In a radio interview shortly after the mission, Wellington noted that, although he had completed some 25 training jumps prior to that night, “this was my first mission since I graduated from [Pararescue] school in April.” Wellington said that he and McManus “were notified that there was a sea captain on the USS ARNOLD [sic] that had been wounded, and he needed whole blood to save his life.”

An HC-130H Hercules was scrambled, with Air Force Captain Eric Palmer in charge of the flight. Flight Surgeon Captain Neal Gray from U.S. Air Force Hospital Tachikawa joined the crew and would provide medical advice to the two Pararescuemen once they were on the scene. McManus confirmed Wellington’s version of events that they were briefed that the ship’s captain had been shot and required whole blood. “We don’t normally carry whole blood, but we got hold of our flight surgeon and emptied out all the fluids from our kits and replaced them with blood,” the retired PJ said.

According to McManus, the aircraft was launched from Tachikawa about 10 p.m. local time. The co-pilot of the aircraft established communications with the ship and stayed in contact during the flight. Once they reached the ship’s location, the Hercules began flying a racetrack pattern as the two Pararescuemen prepared to jump. Below, the crew of the ARNOLD had set flares and illuminated all of the ship’s lights. A number of crewmen and technicians had crowded onto the fantail, watching with a sense of both wonder and concern, as it was an extremely dark night, Harbaugh recalled. According to a contemporaneous report, the seas were running at 20 feet with winds of 16 knots. Wellington later admitted to feeling a combination of excitement and trepidation as he

saw the ship below them, adding, “That ship sure looked lonely, but I knew what my job was...”

“We had just finished getting qualified in night SCUBA jumps,” McManus said. “We’d only been qualified for about six months to do that.” The two PJs talked through what they were about to do. McManus dropped a smoke marker by parachute over the target area to determine drift time. As jumpmaster with more than 100 jumps to his credit, McManus would give Wellington the signal when it was time to jump. The latter shrugged off the trailblazing aspect of what they did, saying merely that the two men were “dropped in with the blood to administer to the captain and render any other medical aid that we could.” Sometime between midnight and one o’clock Sunday morning, Nov. 5, the two PJs made their historic jump.

The PJs hit the water within 30 feet of a waiting life boat, which picked them up after the men had freed themselves of their parachutes. They still had to climb a rope ladder to get on board the spy ship. Before gaining the vessel’s deck, the Pararescuemen did not know exactly what awaited them. McManus noted that PJs were not allowed to jump with weapons at that time, so he and Wellington went on board largely on faith.

Castro had regained consciousness by the time the medics reached him. They quickly set up IVs and checked the captain’s vitals: blood pressure was 100 over 66, pulse 90 and respiration 22. The PJs established communication with Flight Surgeon Gray orbiting at 1,500 feet overhead, and the doctor provided medical advice as they took stock of Castro’s condition. The medics discovered that one bullet had lodged in Castro’s left hand. The second bullet had struck him in the upper right chest about five inches below his collar bone, but there was no exit wound. It was clear that Castro had lost a good bit of blood, so Wellington and McManus began the blood transfusion, eventually giving their patient two units of O Negative whole blood. They also administered morphine to ease the captain’s pain and gave him an antibiotic. The ship’s medic



» The mission was Staff Sergeant Lawrence Wellington’s first since being designated as an Air Force Pararescueman or “PJ” (pictured here as a Technical Sergeant).

» The mission was not only the first jump mission for PJs in about a decade, it marked the first night SCUBA jump for Air Force Special Operations personnel. Sgt. Mike McManus (front row, far left, pictured as a staff sergeant) and Staff Sgt. Lawrence Wellington (back row, far right, pictured as a technical sergeant) were credited with saving Castro's life. Both men received the Air Medal for their actions on Nov. 4-6, 1967.

had previously bound the captain's wounded hand and given him a tetanus shot.

By 5:30 a.m., the PJs could report that Captain Castro was in good condition, and the ARNOLD was underway for Japan. The two men stayed by their patient's side, checking his vitals—once every 30 minutes when he was awake or once an hour when he was sleeping—until the ship arrived in port at Yokosuka just after noon on Monday, Nov. 6. There to meet the ship were a representative from the U.S. Consulate and Castro's wife. The wounded captain was carried ashore and taken to U.S. Naval Hospital Yokosuka. RCA technician Butch Harbaugh, who was watching from the navigation deck, said that the crew never saw Castro again, and a new captain soon joined the ship.

The ARNOLD shifted to the nearby Port of Yokohama, where investigators from the Office of Naval Intelligence and the Coast Guard came on board to interview Rugeles and other crew members. Rugeles was taken on shore for observation and further questioning. None of the rest of the crew or technicians were allowed to leave the ship, and neither were the media allowed on board. At the naval hospital, a spokesman announced that doctors successfully had removed the bullet from Castro's hand but were waiting a week before attempting to remove the other bullet, which was lodged in his back. The delay would allow the wounded officer to regain some of his strength before undergoing additional surgery.

About six weeks after the shooting, Castro wrote a letter to the commanding officer of the 36th Aerospace Rescue and Recovery Squadron, praising Staff Sergeant Wellington and Sergeant McManus, "who risked their lives by parachuting into the Pacific Ocean at midnight to save my life, in the extreme emergency." The hard luck captain then fades from the pages of history.

The two Pararescuemen officially were credited with saving Captain Castro's life, and both men were awarded the Air Medal for their efforts.

More than 50 years after the event, Mike McManus recognizes the historic import of the mission. "It was a good mission," he said recently. "It was the first night SCUBA mission ever for PJs, and it was the first jump mission PJs had had in about 10 years." McManus remained in Japan until 1970, rotated back to the United States for eight months, and then served in Vietnam and Southeast Asia. He later transferred to the New York Air National Guard, where he developed its Pararescue team. Later, McManus transferred to the Alaska Air National Guard, where he led its Pararescue section, as well. McManus married a fellow



airman who later received her commission. Deborah C. McManus eventually served as Commander, Alaska Air National Guard, and Assistant Adjutant General-Air, Alaska, retiring as a brigadier general. Mike McManus retired in 1998 as a Chief Master Sergeant.

Lawrence Wellington remained in Japan until September 1968, when he reported to the 38th Aerospace Rescue and Recovery Squadron detachment at Cam Ranh Bay Air Base, Vietnam. His next assignment took him to Eglin Air Force Base and the Aerospace Rescue and Recovery Training Center. While there, Wellington participated in the months-long planning and practice for the Son Tay Raid, an effort to rescue American prisoners of war. Wellington was on the mission as a volunteer on the night of Nov. 21, 1970. While there were no POWs at Son Tay—they had been moved to another prison camp—then-Technical Sergeant Wellington received the Silver Star for his key role in the rescue of a downed pilot while returning from Son Tay. His citation reads, "The personal skill and extreme courage displayed by Sergeant Wellington ... contributed immeasurably to the ultimate effectiveness and success of the mission."

Wellington's career was cut short when a tree jump went wrong in 1979—he hit his intended target with precision, but the top of the tree broke off, sending the PJ crashing through 130 feet of limbs and foliage to the ground, causing numerous injuries along the way. Wellington retired as a Senior Master Sergeant in June of that year. The retired Air Force Pararescueman died in 1999 at the age of 59, but his family keeps his memory alive and graciously shared his story.

After serving a couple of stints at sea working for RCA, Butch Harbaugh, an Air Force veteran himself who had previously been stationed at Tachikawa Air Base, returned to Mobile to study physics at the University of South Alabama.

NEWS BRIEFS

UNITS POOL EFFORTS TO SAVE SAILOR

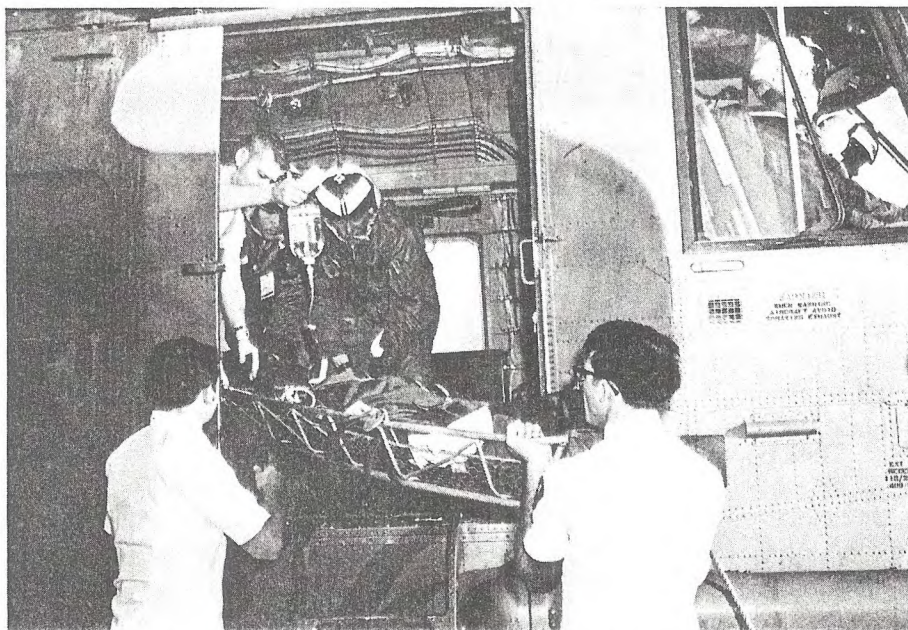
33rd, 36th JOIN IN SEA RESCUE

An HC-130 Hercules teamed with an HH-3 Jolly Green Giant recently to save the life of a Greek sailor suffering from abdominal pains on a freighter some 100 miles east of Okinawa.

An HC-130 Hercules from the 36th Aerospace Rescue and Recovery Squadron (ARRSq), Yokota AB, Japan dropped two pararescuemen to the Greek freighter Prosos to give medical aid to the sailor. Then the 33rd ARRSq, Naha AB, Okinawa, dispatched an HH-3 Jolly Green Giant crew which picked up the sailor and pararescuemen.

The ill sailor was taken to the U. S. Army Hospital at Camp Kue.

The two pararescuemen who jumped to the ship are Staff Sergeants Michael McManus and Verel Adkins.



A GREEK SAILOR, suffering from stomach pains and other internal complications, is lifted from a 33rd ARRSq HH-3E "Jolly Green Giant" helicopter at the U. S. Army Hospital at Camp Kue.

HH-3 AIRLIFTS ILL WOMAN

NAHA AB, Okinawa — A 31-year-old pregnant Ryukyuan female, suffering from internal bleeding, was airlifted from Kume-shima recently by an HH-3E helicopter of the 33rd Aerospace Rescue and Recovery Squadron here.

The woman was flown to Hamby Airfield where she was taken by ambulance to Camp Kue Hospital. Her condition was listed as satisfactory according to hospital officials, however the baby was stillborn.

The mission was considered a save and was the first credited to the 33rd ARRSq since Jan 1.

DET 12 BEGINS YEAR WITH SAVE

ANDERSEN AFB, GUAM — Detachment 12, 41st Aerospace Rescue and Recovery Wing, began 1970 by making a sea-rescue on New Year's Day.

A Det. 12 HH-43 crew picked up one of three swimmers whose raft was carried out to sea near the Agana Naval Air Station. A Navy helicopter picked up the other two men.

Det. 12 is the newest detachment in the 41st Aerospace Rescue and Recovery Wing. It is commanded by Lt. Col. Byron Lawrence.

PARARESCUEMEN RECEIVE MEDALS

HICKAM AFB, Hawaii — Two 76th Aerospace Rescue and Recovery Squadron pararescuemen recently were presented the Airman's Medal for an Aug. 27 mission in which they helped save the life of a heart attack victim at sea.

TSgt. Robert G. Wheeler and Sgt.

Charles R. Ingulli Jr. parachuted to the merchant ship SS Rider Victory with medical supplies to treat the ship's ill master. They jumped at night into 10 to 12 foot swells with only flashlights aboard a whaleboat for a target.

They treated the ill man until the ship docked and he was taken to a hospital.

NEW ARRS WING WILL DIRECT NORTH, SOUTH AMERICA RESCUE

SCOTT AFB, Ill. — The 39th Aerospace Rescue and Recovery Wing, newly activated at Richards-Gebaur AFB, Mo., will begin directing the U. S. Air Force's search and rescue forces in North and South America April 1.

Nearly 100 people are programmed into the newest unit of the worldwide Aerospace Rescue and Recovery Service, with headquarters at Scott AFB.

"This new Rescue wing fills a gap in ARRS' command management structure in this hemisphere," explained Brig. Gen. Allison C. Brooks, ARRS commander.

"We already have Rescue wings to control search, rescue and aircrew recovery in the European and Pacific areas.

When the 39th Wing becomes operational, North and South America will also have optimum organizational control."

Previously, responsibility for search and rescue in this hemisphere was divided among three Aerospace Rescue and Recovery Centers (ARRCs), each also controlling local base rescue helicopter detachments located on many U. S. Air Force bases.

ARRS headquarters directly monitored the centers, three U. S.-based squadrons and five ARRS Reserve squadrons. Now the 39th ARRWg will exercise control over the centers and squadrons.