

Rescueman Ignores Sharks, Saves 10

HQ. 5TH AF, FUCHU AS, Japan — A pararescueman dived into a shark-infested, angry sea to go to the aid of survivors from a Filipino merchant ship that sank in a storm.

SSgt. Richy D. Hindman made four trips in and out of the water in the course of the rescue of 10 sailors, even though he could see giant blue sharks circling the men.

His effort was part of a massive search for survivors after the ship Yakal went down 250 miles southeast of Okinawa.

Rescue aircraft from Kadena AB, Okinawa, and Yokota AB, Japan, took part, along with Navy aircraft and ships from several nations.

Thirteen members of the 41-man crew of the Yakal were rescued. Five perished and 23 are missing.

The ship was carrying 2,000 tons of logs, lashed on deck, bound for Japan. In heavy seas, the lashing gave way and the logs rumbled over the deck to the front of the vessel. Desperate crewmen began trying to unload lifeboats as the ship suddenly listed forward. The propeller came out of the water. The captain got off a message, "Please speed help, water coming in." But the ship sank in a matter of minutes.

The Army harbormaster at Naha, Okinawa, got the message and set rescue machinery into motion.

An HC-130 from Yokota arrived in the area and began dropping survival kits. A Navy P-3 dropped flares through the night, enabling ships in the area to find the men. A Japanese ship picked up two survivors and an Indian vessel a third.

The next morning, helicopters from the 33d Aerospace Rescue and Recovery Squadron from Kadena arrived on the scene.

Capt. Frank Zahbrobsky, aircraft commander, saw men—and sharks. Sergeant Hindman ignored the sharks and went into the water to begin assisting 10 men into rescue harnesses.

At one time, Captain Zahbrobsky saw five sharks circling the rescueman and one of the sailors.

The search for other survivors continued two more days, but all that was found were the bodies of five men and debris.

Pedro Flores, the captain whose six-word message probably saved 13 of his men, apparently went down with his ship.