



U.S. Coast Guard Oral History Program

Interview of **RESCUE SWIMMER AST1 WILLARD MILAM, USCG**

Interview Conducted by **DR. DAVID ROSEN, PACAREA HISTORIAN**

May 1, 2008



AST1 Willard Milam, USCG

INTERVIEWER: This is Dave Rosen interviewing rescue swimmer ST1 Willard Milam from Kodiak, and today's date is May 1st, 2008.

MILAM: Yeah. I guess I'm here to talk about a case I did back in February of '07. I was deployed aboard the Coast Guard cutter *Munro*. That was February 9th. I had to get up in the morning and get down to the hangar. We had our helo off of the ship at that time stored in a hangar on Dutch Harbor.

And we were giving a tour to the local school, and a bunch of kids came over. And we showed them our helicopter, and I was dressing up the teacher in a bunch of our gear and explaining all the swimmer gear. And I had shown them my strobe light, and they had asked me what that was for, and I told them that the strobe light is only used for an emergency if the swimmer is in trouble. That's the only time you will ever see that.

And they had asked me if I used it, and I told them, no, in 14 years, I've never had to use it, and that was it. We gave the tour.

Well, then, it wasn't till later on that night. So this was at 8 in the morning, I think on February 9th, and then early in the hours, we were out. We went out to dinner with the crew, and then the pilots went back to the ship, and we went and shot some pool at one of the establishments in Dutch Harbor.

And because I was on duty, I had the cell phone with me, and I get a call about 11:45 from the aircraft commander, and he says, "Hey, Wil, just to give you a heads up, there's an EPIRB going off near here, and we're not getting launched yet, but District is saying we might be getting launched here. They're waiting to see if they get another hit, that type stuff."

I'm like, "All right. I'll grab the guys, and we'll start heading back that way," and by the time we got back to the ship, the wind was -- when we walked outside, the wind was blowing sideways. It was snowing and hailing and raining, typical Dutch Harbor weather in February.

And we get back to the ship, get aboard the ship, and the pilots are there, and he confirms that, yes, by the time we got there, we were launching. So we start gathering up the flight gear in the ship to head back over to the hangar. Well, while we were gathering up our gear, all the power goes off on the ship.

So we thought maybe, you know, the ship had just lost power due to the storm, you know, some problems with the shore side. Well, then when we leave the ship we realize it's not just the ship. The whole town of Dutch Harbor is dark as we are driving

into -- I just remember not wanting to fly because it was, you know, as we are driving in the van and sleet and rain is hitting, I'm like this isn't going to be fun because 99 times out of 100 we fly out on an EPIRB, we get out there, we're like, "Hey, guys." Talk to some ship and say, "Hey, your EPIRB is going off, you know," and due to the heavy seas or something, it fell off its mount or something, and it's going off.

And I'm like this is going to be a ridiculous flight to tell somebody to turn their EPIRB off, because I've been on lots of those flights. And we get to the hangar, and we've got no way to open up the hangar because all the powers out, and it's powered doors.

Well, our flight mechanic, John Maghupoy, used to work for Pen Air in Dutch Harbor in that hangar. So he knew how to disengage the clutches, so we could manually push the doors open. I mean, what are the odds of that?

So we get the doors open, and the helo is stored behind four other fix-winged aircraft in the Pen Air hangar. So it was kind of tight getting it out with flashlights and trying not to strike any of the other aircraft. We had to rotate the head quite a bit to get it in and out.

And we finally get it outside and get dressed up, and we take off. And as soon as we take off the planes -- and when I say plane, I'm referring to a helicopter, but we call them planes. And pretty good turbulence and we try to climb, but we can't get very high because of the weather. So we end up coming back down. I think we were at 200 feet, 150 feet, flying out of Dutch Harbor, and I just remember quite a bit of turbulence and just sitting in the back going, you know, not looking forward to flying, this is not when you like to fly.

INTERVIEWER: Didn't look good.

MILAM: Didn't look good. So, as we are getting closer, we're heading about 40 miles west of Dutch Harbor, was where they had that EPIRB -- it was narrowed down to, which was pretty close to where the *Selendang Ayu* broke apart. From what I heard, we were only four miles from there.

INTERVIEWER: Oh, boy.



MILAM: And having been out there for that, you know, I was pretty familiar with the area, and I'm sitting in the back of the helicopter, kind of, you know, resigned to the fact that we are going to tell a ship to turn their EPIRB off.

As we get closer, nothing is showing up on radar, and that peaks my interest, going maybe this is the real thing. I started thinking -- because, normally, you'll just get a couple radar targets when you are heading out there to tell a ship to turn off their EPIRB.

And the pilots report they see a couple strobe lights up ahead or, you know, just strobe lights blinking. You know, it might be a buoy marking, you know, or that might be that buoy entering Makushin Bay or this might be that.

So I sit up in the back of the helicopter, you know. I wasn't laying down. I was kind of slouched back, just kind of enjoying the ride, not really, but as we get closer, I start sitting up paying more attention, and all of a sudden, the pilot is like, "There's a steady light up ahead."

And I remembered, okay, that one's not flashing, that's not -- you know, knowing life rafts and I pack life rafts, there's a saltwater-activated light on those rafts that's just a steady glow right on top. So, I sit up, and we start getting closer, and then I just remember this, all of a sudden out the right-hand side of the helicopter, this red flare goes up into the mist. And you really couldn't see the flare. It was just a glow of red because of the rain and the snow and the sleet.

I was like, holy cow, and right at the time I see the flare, the pilot is like, "I got a flare. I got a flare. I got a flare." And it wasn't a minute after that, we had flown up, and he goes, "Life raft, life raft." And we had found a life raft, and we overfly this life raft.

And then, I hear on the -- over the communications, the pilot go, "Let's start rescue checklist part one for our rescue swimmer deployment," and I just kind of looked back in the helicopter around. I guess that's me, you know.

I wasn't too excited about going in, not at all, to say the least, you know, because I knew what the weather was and was not full of gung ho. You know, back earlier in my career, I might have been like, yeah, here we go.

So I get my gear out and got the fins and stuff like that, and we come into a hover, and the flight mech opens the door. And I just remember as soon as he opened the door and I looked down, I'm sliding to the door, and I see the raft. And I'm like, "I pulled my retirement letter for this?" [Laughter.]

And I say that because that's exactly what I thought because I was supposed to retire in August of '06 but ended up pulling my retirement letter after going to Hurricane Katrina and talking to the master chief, and, you know, they convinced me to do another tour, and they offered me to stay in Kodiak. So I thought, all right, I'll do another tour in Kodiak, and I loved Alaska.

Yeah. So I pulled my retirement letter, and I just looked down at the raft. I'm like, "I can't believe I'm getting ready to go into this."

So they lowered me into the water, and as soon as I hit the water, I couldn't see the raft anymore. I disconnected from the cable, and I just started swimming in the direction of the search light. And I'd see the raft through the waves. I'd see the raft. Then I'd lose the raft. Then I'd see the raft, and I'd lose the raft.

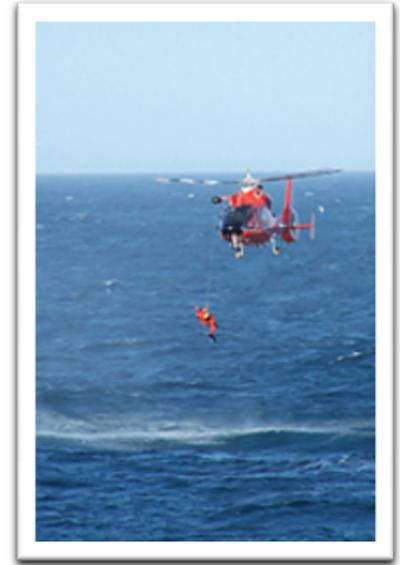
And I arrived at the raft, and the seas were, you know, 15, you know, an honest 15 feet breaking, blowing, and I get to the raft, and I climb into the raft. And, normally, on every other case that I've been on and the people I've gone to rafts on and people -- I'm expecting to see people in a survival suit in the raft. I've seen it several times in my career.

I climb into the raft, poke my head in, and there's four guys in street clothes, and they're all wet. I was like -- and one guy -- I asked everybody if they were okay, but one guy was just not even coherent enough, and he was the most severe. So I thought like, oh, now we got a problem.

So I called up to the helicopter. I straddle the raft. I'm just straddling it at the door to the raft. They had the canopy up and everything.

I said, "Hang on, guys." They spoke broken English. There were two Russians and two Hispanic gentlemen, and so I get on the radio. First, I confirm that that was everybody from the boat, and I was able to get from the skipper of the ship, that was everybody. That was the crew. Nobody was missing. So that's good. We got all four. My concern was, to get them out of the raft, I had to get them back in the water, but nobody is in survival suits.

So I call up to the helicopter, and I said, "Hey, listen, I've got all four people from the boat accounted for. There is nobody else. We need to -- I recommend you deliver the basket. You know, tell Johnny we need the basket as close the raft as possible to



minimize these people's exposure to the water because none of them are in survival suits."

So there was a pause on the radio, and they are like, "Roger that, Wil. Stand by," and then I waited. And then the pilot comes back up, you know, "Swimmer, you know, 6509" -- or 25. I can't remember the tail number of helicopter anymore, but he goes, "We've discussed it up here, and if you're okay with it, we're going to send down our personal survival suits." You know, so they've made the decision in the helicopter to give up the air crew survival suits to place these guys into it.

And I was like, "Yeah, that sounds like a good idea," and he goes, "Okay. Well, give Johnny a few minutes. He's got to, you know, get them rigged up to send down to you." I'm like, "Okay."

So I tell the guys in the ship. I explain to them survival suits are coming, and we are going to get in them. So, because of the -- you know, he's having a hard time trying to hold a hover out there because of the weather. They send down a trail line to me.

And I can see the trail line blowing in the wind, and Johnny's trying to get it over the raft, and I see it hit the water about -- oh, I don't know -- ten yards away from us. So I lift up my right leg and to speed up the process because I knew they were having trouble getting it delivered directly into the raft. I jumped back into the water to go get the weight bag and the trail line. Well, as I slid off the raft and got into the water, something had happened to my suit.

I didn't know what had happened at the time, but all of a sudden when I went into the water, my suit starts filling up with water. So something has happened because I had already swam to the raft, and I got to the raft. I'm dry. Everything's fine. We're good to go. But it's when I'm straddling the raft and I swung my right leg out of the raft to slide back down into the water, when I entered the water, it just instantly took my breath away.

The water is like -- it's not like a slow leak. Water is flowing into my suit.

INTERVIEWER: Freezing.

MILAM: Yeah, freezing. So I start frantically trying to figure out if my seals had ripped or my zipper is open, but with my gloves and all my gear on, I can't find the T handle, and the waves are bouncing up and down, and waves are breaking. I'm just like forget it, I just need to get the trail line.

So I gave up trying to figure out, and we're talking a matter of seconds before I was like, you know, I'm just going to get the trail line. So I swim over and get the trail

line. I get back to the raft.

I throw the trail line into the raft, and I try to climb up onto the raft, and I can only get the top half of my body out of the water because I try to get out and my lower half of my suit is all full of water. So I get the guy, the skipper of the boat to -- as I get my leg up on the surface of the water, I tell him. I point to my leg to pull my leg in. So he pulls me in, and then I start tending the trail line, pulling down the four survival suits that are connected to the cable. So they are lowering the survival suits to me.

And while the survival suits come right to me and I'm sitting back on the side of the raft again, I unhook the survival suits -- there's four of them on the hook -- thinking that they might have been tied together. Wasn't thinking too good, actually, because when I opened up the hook, two of the suits fell into the water and started floating away. They are all wrapped up in their bags. The other two go into -- you know, I get the other two into the raft, and I tell the guy, "Take this survival suit."

I tell the three of them, "Help the guy that's in and out of conscious, who's not doing real well, and let's get him in his suit first, and I'll take him first." Well, then I said, "I got to go get rafts. I'll be right back." So I jump back into the water, and once again, you know, I can feel water coming in, and I deep-feet for the two survival suits that are floating away. I get the two survival suits, swim back for the raft, go through the process of getting my leg pulled into the raft again, and now I'm starting to shiver.

So we get the first guy into the survival suit, and it's real tight in there. So we can only work with one guy trying to get a survival suit on at a time. As I get this guy out of the raft, I tell the other three, start getting dressed, I'll be back.

So I leave the raft with this guy, and when he gets into the water, he starts combat -- you know, he didn't -- he starts fighting me. He's hypothermic. He's in, you know --

INTERVIEWER: Shock.

MILAM: He don't like to be in the water, you know, and I can't blame the guy when I sit back and look at it. Last place a guy that was on a boat that just sank wants to be is --

INTERVIEWER: Back in the water.

MILAM: -- back in the water after he got in the raft. So, as Johnny is delivering the basket down to me, at one point, I got a hold of the basket, but then when the wave broke over us, the basket was ripped out of my hand, and I couldn't hang on to it anymore.

So it took a little while to get the basket delivered to me, and once I put this guy in the basket, the basket sits low in the water, and then he gets his -- once he's in the basket, when he's sitting properly, the water is right up to his chin, and I got to give a "ready for pickup" signal. Well, when the wave breaks over the basket, he don't like it, and he starts fighting again. So it was a pretty good struggle to get him into the basket.

Once we got him in the basket and he went up, because it had taken so long, I turn around, and I'm looking for the raft, and I can't even -- I see the strobe light, not the strobe light but the light that is the steady light on top of it, and I can barely make out the outline because the raft has drifted away due to the winds just outside the search light area, and I see it over there.

Well, I start to swim towards it, but my suit is so full of water, and I'm having trouble. I'm like there's no way I am catching that thing, and that's -- at that point is when I decided to give the emergency signal. The little tour that morning and that thought went through, I can't believe I never said -- I said I never use this stupid thing.

So I put the strobe light on top of my head, and the guy went up in the basket, and then the basket came right back down for me.

We get up. They pick me up. I get into the plane, and I can't get out of the basket because my suit is full of water. I look like I weighed 300 pounds. So Johnny tips the basket on its side, and I wiggle out of the basket, and I tell him. I said, "I got water in my suit." I'm yelling, you know, "something is wrong" to Johnny. I said, "Check my seals," because I can't see my neck seal.

So Johnny checks my seals, pulls on my zipper handles, and I'm sitting there looking like I weighed 300 pounds. And I get on ICS, put my helmet back on to talk to the pilots. They're like, "Hey Wil, what's the matter?" I'm like, "Man, I'm freezing. You know, my suit is full of water. I don't know what's going on," and I thought I was talking normal. Talking to the pilots afterwards, I was -- my voice didn't sound right. I was chattering and shivering, but I didn't know that. I mean, I just knew I was cold, but I thought everything was working fine.

So we discussed putting the basket back down the raft without me, and they're like do you think we could just lower the basket down and they'll get in the basket by themselves. I'm like -- we only got about 15 more minutes of fuel before we have to start heading back. Otherwise, we are not going to make it back, and I'm like, "If all we have got, if all we have is 15 more minutes," I said, "I got 15 more minutes in me. You know, we'll just go with it."

And so they asked me again if I was sure. I said, "Well, there's no way we are

getting all three of them in 15 minutes without me going down there. You know, we might get one or two and we are going to leave somebody out here."

And to go back to Dutch Harbor and land at 3 in the morning and try to get fueled back up to get back out there and get that guy, you know, who knows where he'd be. Who knows if he'd have blown into shore, and so I told -- I insisted pretty much, you know, "I'm good. I'm good to go. Let's just do this," and we had discussed -- when they put me down, I said, "Johnny, let's put me down in the basket, and instead of hoisting the basket back up, let me swim into the raft. I'll get out of the basket. To speed things up, I will take the basket with me to the raft, just start hanging out slack. It will save a hoist and a whole procedure, and I'll put one guy in it." And they agreed.

So I get to the door, and I'm feeling sick, and I remember forcing myself to vomit at the door of the helicopter. Just, you know, I was feeling sick, I'm like I'm just going to puke this up, and then I'll feel good for the next 20 minutes. So I puked at the door and down goes the basket. I go down in the basket. I get out of the basket, and I swim towards the raft. And they put me real close. So I didn't have to swim very far, thankfully.

I get to the raft. I grab one guy. I'm like, you know -- I see a guy in a survival suit, and I'm thankful that they've gotten in their survival suits. All right, let's go, and I put him in the basket, and he does not want to sit down in that basket, and he's fighting with me. And my patience is getting -- you know, I'm freezing. I'm cold. I know we're short on time, and every time I put him in the basket, he wanted to climb up on it sideways and hang on and get his head up by the hook, and I'd have to, you know, undo his hands, and I'd throw him back down and push down on his waist. And there was a few expletives used, you know, "sit the -- down and relax." Yeah, there was a lot of -- and he got a -- he got -- he got punched -- not punched in the face, but, you know, physically grabbed. I remember putting my hand on his face and tripping the lower part of his survival suit and pulling his face right to mine and yelling, "Calm the -- down."

But, you know, I understand why they are combative. You know, it's not their fault. I mean, it's just a scary proposition, you know, but I got to get them out.

So, finally he goes up, and I get back to the raft, and I tell the other two guys, "Calm down," you know, while the basket is going up. I'm telling these guys, "Calm down. I'm going to put you in the basket. We'll be good."

Well, the basket comes back down, and I cannot stress how awesome of a job the air crew did up there because they were delivering that basket to me on these hoists within arm's reach almost.

I mean, on the third person, we were pulling out, I literally had a hold of the raft in

my left hand, and I grabbed the basket in my right hand, and I never let go of the raft. I was like that was a sweet delivery.

And I get the next guy in. That one goes much easier than the first two. So I get him up pretty quick. I get back to the last guy. It's the skipper of the boat. I'm like, "All right. Are you ready?" And he's asking me if I'm okay, and I'm pretty cold. I mean, I can feel myself getting extremely cold because I'm not even in the -- I don't even bother getting back into the raft on these evolutions.

I'm just hanging out on the outside of the raft because I know I can't climb into the raft now at this point with my suit full of water, and so the basket comes down for the last time, and I remember I had to let go of the raft a little bit. I swim over, and I grab the basket. And as I turn around to grab the raft and pull the basket in, the skipper jumps from the raft. He stood up, kind of like -- and went feet first and went right through the basket. He went through the bales of the basket, flips the basket upside down. Now he's on his belly. The basket is on his back.

INTERVIEWER: Oh, Lord.

MILAM: The cables on -- and now he's on his belly trying to keep his head above water in 15-foot seas. On your belly in a survival suit is not the place to be, and he's panicking. So I'm trying to yank him out of the basket. I finally get him out of the basket, but the basket has already taken a couple loops, and what I see is the basket cable is looped around the basket a couple times, the hoist cable is.

Well, I get him into a cross-chest carry, what we call a cross-chest carry, and I get a hold of him, and I'm trying to undo the cable with one hand when a wave breaks over the both of us, and then he gets out of my grip. He freaks out when the wave breaks, and when I look back on it, I was so cold, I could barely hang onto him. So he was able to get out of my grip. I turn around, and I see him. Now he's on his belly, and he's coming back at me because all I am to a person in the water is a piece of flotation, and they just want to be on me.

As I see him coming to me, I notice that the cable is looped around his neck. He's got cable around his neck and his arm, and I'm looking. I'm like uh-oh. Fortunately, John Maghupoy, the flight mech, saw the cable looped around his neck and gave me pretty much all 200 feet of the cable. He just started paying it out because had that table gone tight --

INTERVIEWER: That would be the end.

MILAM: Yeah. Then we wouldn't had to worry about rescuing that guy.

So, as he's coming at me in the water on his belly, I just remember him. He's flopping on his belly, coming right at me, and I put my hand in his face and turn him around. I execute what we call a "front-head hold release." But -- and it was severely modified because you're not really supposed to punch them in the face when you do it, but he got the palm of my hand in his face, turned him around, got the cable off of his neck, got that untangled, put him back into a one-arm cross-chest carry, and I go back to the basket, and I'm trying to do it one-handed again, when another wave breaks. And once again, he gets away from me, but he doesn't have a cable around him.

Then I remember thinking, there's no way I am going to get this basket untangled unless I just get away from him. So, as he came at me again, I put my foot up in his chest and kicked him away from me and gave him the hold signal or, you know, I just put my hand up like stop, just stay there. And I took the basket, and I started kicking away from him as I'm trying to untangle the basket.

I get the cable off of the basket, get it unwound from the hook, and when I turn around, here he is coming. He's coming at me. You know, he's coming. I'm like fine, here you go. And I put him in the basket, and he didn't want to sit down in the basket either. It was another fight. Finally, after I don't know how long, he goes up. Once I saw him leave the water, I was like, "Thank God, this is over."

And then that's when the cold really set in. I mean that's when I remember it getting -- once those guys were gone, now I'm --

INTERVIEWER: Hyperthermic.

MILAM: Yeah. I'm sitting there shivering in the water going just get the basket back down here for me, and make sure we have enough fuel and weight to get me back.

Well, I see the basket coming down, and I start swimming to it, and what I thought I was doing was swimming to it, but talking to the flight mechanic, he said my arms weren't even coming out of the water. I was on my belly, and I was just kind of pushing water band and forth. In my mind, I thought I was stroking towards the basket, and they pretty much scooped me out of the water. And I didn't realize it till months later. I thought I was fine.

INTERVIEWER: You weren't in the basket then?

MILAM: They picked me up with the basket, but I hadn't gotten into the basket. Well, I got into it, but they had pretty much -- you know, I couldn't get in. I mean, to this -- you know, I thought I was doing everything fine. In my mind, I thought I was swimming fine, I was getting in the basket fine. I remember -- the last thing I remember

was I remember swimming towards the basket. I don't remember getting in the basket. I remember getting in to the helicopter and getting dumped out of the basket, and I see four guys patting me on the head.

You know, all these guys are -- I turn around. I look, and there is four guys all stacked up in the back of this little H-65 helicopter giving me a thumbs up, and I give them a thumbs up.

And then the flight back -- apparently, on the flight back, talking to the pilot and the air crew afterwards, you know, weeks after this thing, they were telling me that they had tried talking to me, and, you know, I would say something, but I was chattering so bad, they couldn't hear me. I thought I was speaking fine, but they'd say I would yell out, "Altitude," you know, just backing them up, what's our altitude, because on the flight out to the case, I would be like, "What's our altitude? You know, you guys got a good picture of the land mass?" just backing them up and make sure they are looking down at that stuff, and we're not flying into the water on a dark storm.

So, apparently, on the flight back, I'd be like -- they'd hear me, all of a sudden, go, "Altitude." And I don't remember -- I remember when we got back, somebody -- Johnny was grabbing me, "We're back -- we're back," and I got out of the helicopter and stood up and went to one knee and got back up. And I wrote in my write-up, I remembered walking two survivors to the ambulance, and then that's what I had put in my write-up, and the reason I say that is because then the aircraft commander told me, when he read the write-up, he goes, "Wil, you didn't walk survivors to the ambulance. That was a paramedic and I." An aircraft commander and a paramedic walked me to the ambulance. They were dragging me to the ambulance.

I don't remember -- I vaguely remember an ambulance ride, telling somebody not to cut my suit. And then the next thing I remember was I was looking at ceiling lights, and there are these heat lamps on each side of me, and I didn't realize that they were below me until later on. And then I'd hear voices, and I couldn't move. I was wrapped up in something really tight, and this is a few hours later. I didn't know where I was, and then I could hear voices talking, you know, and then as I was slowly coming out of it, I would be like, "Okay. I'm in a hospital somewhere," didn't know where I was.

But what was funny is -- I tell people this because it is pretty -- my personality is I try to find the humor in everything. I hear this female voice. There's a nurse, and my doctor was a female too. And she had flat out said, "Okay. We need to get another rectal temperature from Mr. Milam." I put rectal and Milam together, and it was like a fog. I was fighting, and I started going, "No." I'm mouthing the words, "No," and I'm like, "No. No."

And finally, somebody goes, this woman -- I see a woman lean over the top of

me because I can't look left or right, and I'm kind of just laying there, and she looks. "Hey, Wil, how are you doing? How are you feeling?" I'm like, "Tired," you know, and literally, as people were talking, you know, I'm kind of -- I'm like -- I felt worn out, and they had said it was because I was violently shivering, and I should be feeling worn out. And they had told me that talking to the paramedics, they were almost going to Life Flight me back to Anchorage, but they got my temperature back up, and they had -- I was on my third bag of warmed IV fluid. I had heat lamps above and below me, and I was cocooned in these heated blankets that they were putting in some oven or -- I don't know what they were doing, but they were warming these blankets up. And, yeah, I was -- I don't know how long it was after that, but I just remember having to go to the bathroom really bad. I was all cocooned up, I'm like, "I have to pee bad," you know, and they are giving me all this IV fluid.

And they are like, well, okay, we can put in a catheter. I'm like, "I can walk. Get me unwrapped, and get me out of here. I'm not doing any of that stuff, and the nurse is like, "Are you refusing treatment?" I'm like, "What are you talking about?" She goes, "The rectal temp." I'm like, "Yeah. I'm refusing. I don't want to do any of that stuff." And when she said we need to do another, I was like, "Well, I wasn't around for the first one. So that one doesn't count." I don't remember that one, so we're good there, but I'd remember this one. We're not doing this one."

INTERVIEWER: That's so funny. How long were you in the hospital?

MILAM: I checked out of the hospital at like 7, I believe, and I think we landed at 3. And the reason -- the only reason I really checked out, they kept looking at me in the boat. The boat was getting underway to go back into the Bering. Our port call was over, and we had to get the helo back on the boat, and I'm like, "I got to get out of here. You know, we're leaving. I got to go the helo," and she's like, "Are you good?" And I'm like, "Yeah, I'm good. Just let me out," and she goes, "I wouldn't go swimming if I were you. You're more susceptible to cold." I was told, you know. "Just tell me what I need to be careful of," and she goes, "Well, you know" -- and they flat out told me for the rest of my life that I would get colder easier. And I was like, "For the rest of my life?" I thought she was talking -- you know, you're going to be more susceptible to cold getting that hypothermic, and since the case, I do notice -- I spend a lot of times outdoors. That I do wear one extra layer here, you know. I can see now, you know. She's right. You know, I do feel a little colder, but it's not like --

INTERVIEWER: Life or death.

MILAM: -- life or death. It's just, you know, I found myself wearing an extra layer when I'm out hunting or hiking or something like that. I can see that I get colder just a little easier. But there's nothing too crazy.

But the crew, you know, all this -- the awards and accolades they give for this, it was almost embarrassing. You know, it's like that's what we're supposed to do, you know, and I tell everybody this because I think it gets overlooked a lot, especially since the movie, "The Guardian," and even before then.

It's always swimmer this, swimmer that, you know, and the fact of the matter is our crew saved four people that night, but I tell everybody that the pilots and the flight mech saved. . .

INTERVIEWER: You're right.

MILAM: And I get a little choked up when I think about it because now -- that's it.

INTERVIEWER: Well, I appreciate you taking the time. It's an amazing story, got it "fresh off the boat."

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END OF INTERVIEW



AST1 Milam on patrol in Bering Sea.



MILAM (For Release)

MILAM-03: NEW YORK - Petty Officer 1st Class Wil Milam, an aviation survival technician at Coast Guard Air Station Kodiak, receives the Coast Guard Foundation Award for Heroism Thursday night [18 October 2007] from Adm. Thad Allen, Commandant of the Coast Guard. (Photo by John Harrington, courtesy of the Coast Guard Foundation).

