



## U.S. Coast Guard Aviation History

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### HC-130H CGNR 1500 PARTICIPATION IN SAR CASE FOLLOWING DITCHING OF NAVY P-3C PD-2 AF 586 (Bureau No. 159892) 26 OCTOBER 1978

Courtesy of RADM Robert L. Johanson, USCG (Ret.)

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#### SUMMARY OF ACTION

##### **Background:**

At 1430 on 26 October 1978, "Alfa Foxtrot 586", a Navy P-3C flying with a crew of fifteen on a reconnaissance mission from the VP-9 detachment at Naval Station Adak, Alaska, ditched near position 52 degrees 39 minutes North, 167 degrees 24 minutes East (approximately 290 miles west of Shemya Island in the Aleutians) following a propeller malfunction and succession of engine fires in its number one engine. VP 9's Aircraft Accident Report recorded conditions at the time of ditching as "1500 foot ceiling, one and one-half to three miles visibility in rain showers, wave height 12-20 feet, winds 223 degrees at 43 knots." Water temperature was approximately 40 degrees. The aircraft sank within 90 seconds. Thirteen of the fifteen crew members managed to board two of the three life rafts – a Mark 7 and a Mark 12 - carried by the P-3C (one other raft remained in the aircraft). Twelve hours later, ten survivors were recovered from their rafts by personnel aboard the Soviet fishing vessel MYS *Sinyavin*, along with the bodies of three men who had died from hypothermia.

CG 1500's involvement in this case began at 1415 26 October when the aircraft was returning to CGAS Kodiak from Adak, following a three-day deployment conducting fisheries law enforcement patrols and loran station logistics. Approximately one hour from landing at Kodiak, CG 1500 was diverted to assist in the SAR effort

Chronology (all times are local, all dates are 26 October 1978 unless otherwise indicated)

1353: Navy P-3C AF 586 transmitted a MAYDAY to Elmendorf Airways stating they were ditching 290 miles west of Shemya, in position 52 degrees 39 minutes North, 167 degrees 24 minutes East.

1415: Kodiak RCC diverted CG 1500 to the ditching site. The aircraft was approximately one hour from landing at CGAS Kodiak on its return flight from Adak after three days of conducting fisheries law enforcement patrols and loran station logistics support. Considering fuel state (7 hours to dry tanks) and distance to scene (1300 miles), the aircraft commander (LTJG William Porter) decided to refuel at Adak before proceeding to the ditching site.

1432: P3C XF 675, the VP-9 detachment's Ready Alert aircraft, departed Adak en route the reported ditching site.

1522: Air Force RC-135S Scone 92, which had departed Shemya at 1446 on a reconnaissance mission, was diverted to the reported ditching coordinates.

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#### **Summary Of Action - CG 1500\_AF 586**

1610: Scone 92 arrived on scene and commenced a circular visual search pattern at 1200 feet – 1800 feet, remaining below clouds.

1617: Scone 92 sighted a flare and identified two rafts at position 52 degrees 34 minutes North, 167 degrees 31 minutes East, and passed this information to XF 675 which was en route to the scene. No aircraft or visual wreckage was sighted at any time.

1640: XF 675 arrived on scene, descended to 500' and relieved Scone 92 as on-scene commander (OSC). Scone 92 climbed to 34,000' to assume a radio relay role.

1645: XF 675 sighted both rafts with a total (estimated) of seven survivors, then dropped smoke markers and sonobuoys to mark the rafts. The smoke markers were ineffective due to winds (30 knots with gusts).

1713: CG-1500 landed at Naval Station Adak for refueling and briefing.

1810: CG-1500 departed Adak en route to the scene.

1913: XF 675 dropped SAR kit (two rafts + equipment package) to the upwind raft (Mk 12), but the survivors were unable to retrieve rafts, and were too weakened to lift equipment package which they left tied alongside one of their rafts.

1938: CG 1500 arrived on scene in darkness and assumed OSC. After matching altimeter settings with XF 675 and assigning them a Tacan setting to determine (and ensure) separation between the two aircraft, CG 1500 descended to 500 feet, dropped flares and a Datum Marker Buoy (DMB) at the location provided by XF 675, and began tracking the DMB. Visual contact was limited to the occasional flashing of a strobe light; no one in the aircraft actually saw the rafts at that time. XF 675 climbed off station to commence search for a rescue vessel.

1955: XF 675 held a surface ship in radar contact approximately 30 nautical miles southwest of the life rafts.

2014: HC-130H CG 1600 departed CGAS Kodiak to relieve CG 1500 on scene, after refueling at Shemya AFB en route.

2015: XF 675 arrived over the surface contact (*Mys Sinyavin*, a 300' Russian trawler).

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#### **Summary Of Action - CG 1500\_AF 586**

2015-2036: XF 675 made numerous low passes over and near *Sinyavin*) while signaling with their landing lights. Having no means of communicating via voice, XF 675 flashed (at the suggestion of CG 1500) "CEF" in Morse Code, the international signal "aircraft in the water – follow me". *Sinyavin* acknowledged their signal with a searchlight and was observed by XF 675 to head in the general direction of the ditching site. There were no voice communications between XF 675 and *Sinyavin*.

2036: XF 675 departed the area for Shemya AFB after passing information about *Mys Sinyavin* to CG 1500.

2130 (approx.): CG 1500 dropped a MA-2 kit (including two-way radio) from 200 feet to a light in the water, but it was not recovered by the survivors. CG 1500 climbed back to 500 feet, located *Mys Sinyavin* on radar and proceeded toward its position. LTJG Richard Holzshu, CG 1500 co-pilot, began calling the vessel on VHF FM Channel 16.

2200 (approx.) : Arriving overhead *Sinyavin*, CG 1500 found the vessel heading east northeast at approximately ten knots, downwind in quartering seas, roughly in the direction indicated by XF 675. Winds were gale force, with visibility approximately a mile in rain and snow. After CG 1500 buzzed *Sinyavin* several times, the vessel's radio operator (Makhov) finally answered LTJG Holzshu's calls on Channel 16, but they were unable to communicate due to language difficulties. Makhov was then replaced by Maslov who was not a radioman, but did speak some English.

Initially, the appearance of CG 1500 overhead led *Sinyavin's* captain to believe it was the C-130 that was in distress and preparing to ditch near the trawler. CG 1500's aircraft commander, LTJG William Porter, clarified the situation, then advised *Sinyavin* that there were "friends in the water – course 090 at 25 miles – please go". LTJG Porter, unaware that *Sinyavin* had been informed by the Soviet Ministry of Fisheries (after communications between Washington and Moscow) to assist in the rescue effort, was unsure whether the Russian captain would attempt, at considerable risk to his crew, a hazardous rescue of the American servicemen in the water. Accordingly, he chose his words carefully and judiciously, as reflected in the following excerpt from the article "Manislov (sic), This is Bill" which appeared in the December 1979 issue of *Alaska Magazine*:

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After LTJG Porter provided the clarification described above, he and Manislov (Maslov) exchanged names and had the following dialogue:

Maslov: "Bill, we go. Who in water?"

LTJG Porter: "Manislov, friends in water. Please go"

Maslov: "I understand, Bill. Thank you"

LTJG Porter: "Manislov, you speak good English".

Maslov: "Thank you, Bill. Bill, how far?"

LTJG Porter: "Course 090 at 20 miles".

Maslov responded with the observation - "Bill, you speak good English, too" – eliciting laughter from the crew in CG 1500.

Scone 92, overhead at FL 340, heard the radio communications between CG 1500 and *Sinyavin*, and realized that the trawler had been slightly off course heading to the rafts until receiving the directions provided by CG 1500. *Sinyavin*'s master, Alexandr Alexeevich Arbuzov, later confirmed that CG 1500 led him to the rafts, regularly correcting their course through the high seas.

In leading *Sinyavin* to the survivors, CG 1500 flew back and forth between the ship and the DMB dropped shortly after they arrived on scene. They dropped a 15-minute smoke float every other pass, giving the aircraft a good flame target that was easier to see than the strobe light nearby the DMB. When approximately five miles from the rafts, *Sinyavin* turned on all lights as requested, but not its foghorn...until LTJG Porter provided, as a substitute for the word "horn, "honk – honk – honk". At two miles from the rafts, *Sinyavin* could see the smoke floats, and shortly thereafter a red flare burst in front of CG 1500, directly between the smoke floats.

270145 October: Crewmen in a whaleboat launched by *Sinyavin* picked up four survivors from the Mark 12 raft. During that recovery, CG 1500 sighted another flare two miles to the north and proceeded to the position. Arriving overhead, a third flare fired by AF 586 survivors in the Mk 7 raft passed close aboard the aircraft's right wing. LTJG Porter advised *Sinyavin*, whose captain did not know there was a second raft. CG-1500 then dropped its last smoke float and directed *Sinyavin* to the Mk 7 raft.

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#### **Summary Of Action - CG 1500\_AF 586**

270155: CG 1600, preparing to let down for landing at Shemya AFB, is advised by Shemya Tower that the field is closed because of high crosswinds. Aware that CG 1500 was approaching low fuel state and had also planned to land at Shemya, CG 1600 immediately called CG 1500 to apprise them of the situation, and then headed for Adak.

270200: CG 1500 departed scene for Adak due to low fuel state, after advising and thanking *Sinyavin*. At the time, the ship was proceeding to the second raft (Mark 7) where they recovered six survivors and three deceased from P3C AF 586..

270400: Approaching Adak, CG 1500 is informed by an Air Force C-130 that they decided not to land at Adak because of reported extreme (Category 06) turbulence. With Shemya AFB closed due to weather and low fuel state a factor, CG 1500 had no alternative.

270455: CG 1500 landed at Naval Station Adak after a 23 hour crew-mission day and 17.3 flight hours (11 hours beyond CG-333 crew mission time limits, and 9.3 hours beyond flight time limits). Fuel quantity gauges indicated 1000 pounds remaining in each main tank.

LTJG Porter encountered moderate turbulence and winds of 50 knots with gusts as he flew a precision radar approach to Runway 23, breaking out near minimums and circling to land on Runway 18. At his direction, co-pilot LTJG Holzshu interrupted the GCA controller's transmission to request that the lights for RW 23 be turned on to provide more visual reference. At some point the RW 23 lights were turned off, producing brief disorientation before the lights for RW 18 were turned on. Adak Tower was evacuated shortly after the arrival of CG 1500, as the winds continued to increase.

The crew of HC-130H CGNR 1500 were instrumental in saving the lives of ten crew members from Navy P3C PD-2 "Alfa Foxtrot 586" (Bureau No. 159892) after that aircraft ditched in the North Pacific Ocean west of Shemya Island on 26 October 1978. Arriving on scene after dark in turbulent weather, CG 1500 marked the reported position of the survivors' rafts with a buoy and smoke floats, proceeded to and established communications with a Soviet fishing vessel, *Mys Sinyavin*, located approximately 25 miles west of datum, and then directed that vessel to both rafts, ultimately resulting in the rescue of ten survivors and the recovery of three dead crewmembers from AF 586. The latter died from exposure after approximately ten - twelve hours in the water-laden rafts, and it is unlikely that the other ten crewmembers could have survived in their rafts much longer as they were all in the advanced stages of hypothermia when rescued by *Mys Sinyavin*.

