

U.S. Coast Guard History Program

Captain David Gershowitz, USCG

**Coast Guard Aviator #232
Coast Guard Helicopter Pilot #7**

1918-1995

By

Dr. Dave Rosen

Capt Dave Gershowitz was one of the early helicopter enthusiasts along with Frank Erickson and Stewart Graham (Pilots #1 and #2). Originally a CG Fireman from Brooklyn, NY, he trained as a pilot in Pensacola from August 1942- May 1943. Dave returned to CGAS Brooklyn under Executive Officer Erickson at Floyd Bennett Field in Brooklyn, the CG test site for Sikorski helicopters. Despite skepticism and hostility from CG leadership, Erickson convinced HQ to allow Sikorski to supply helos for training purposes. (ft 1)



Dr. Igor Sikorsky

In World War II Gersh flew helicopters on shore patrols while convoys leaving for England. Moreover, he was tasked by the Department of Agriculture to spray DDT over farms in the Northeast. These tests resulted in anti-malaria spraying in the Pacific War.

From Floyd Bennett Field, Dave flew several of the earliest SAR cases using helos, including airlifting an inhalator to an icebound ship in Long Island Sound. (ft 2). After he hoisted a doctor to a rowboat in the *Ambrose Lightship* SAR case, Gershowitz achieved national renown as a CG hero. He became known as the *Flying Rabbi* or *O'Hara*, since people had difficulty pronouncing his last name.



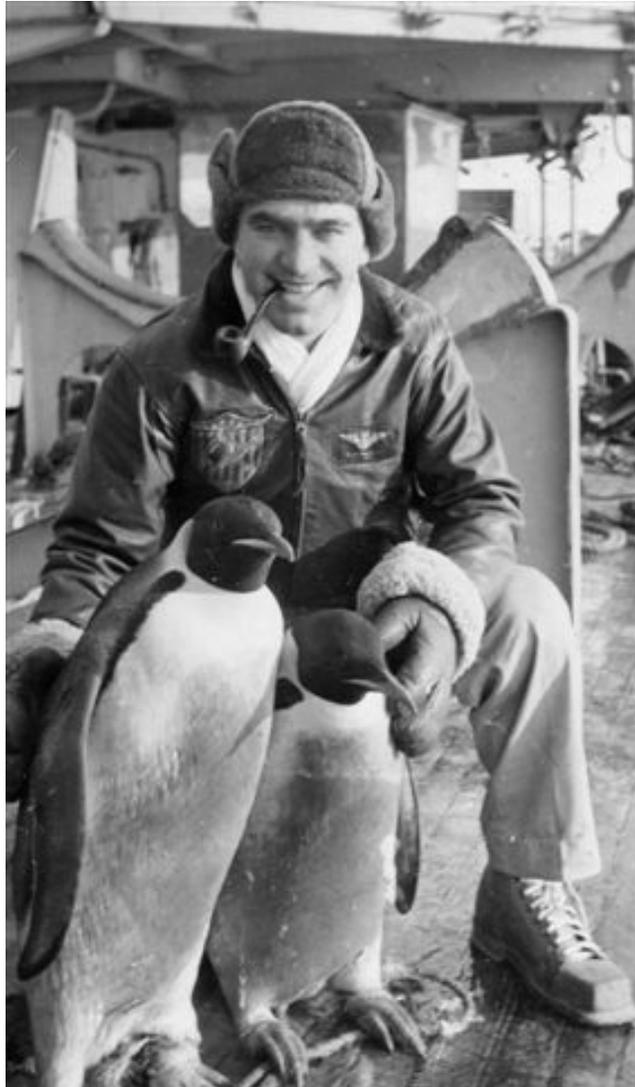
Gershowitz flies by the Statue of Liberty

ORDER OF THE PENGUIN

In 1946, CDR Erickson recommended that the CG send Dave to the Naval Test Pilots School at Patuxent, Md, the largest Naval Air test center in the US. He already had 500 hours of flying time. Gershowitz was not only the first CG pilot to graduate, but he was responsible for the Rotary Wing Test Project. He demonstrated the helicopter to Congress by landing at the Capitol Building and circling it repeatedly.

Afterwards, Lt. Gershowitz served as one of three pilots on the icebreaker *Northwind* as part of **Operation High Jump** under Admiral Richard Byrd. His helo, called the *Flying Penguin*, flew ahead of the *CGC Northwind* seeking passages through the ice floes. Flying conditions were extremely dangerous as fog blotted out sight and sound.

High Jump lasted from December 1946 – March 1947, encompassing eleven ships and 4000 men. Capt Charles Thomas of the *Northwind* called the helicopter *the best piece of equipment ever carried on ice vessels*. (ft 3). Two penguins journeyed back to the US, overnighing in Dave's home bathtub. He received the *Order of the Penguin* for crossing the Arctic Circle.



Gershowitz with the *Northwind's* penguin passengers

CG HELO PILOT #7

US AIR MEDAL

As a pilot, Dave logged 3000 hours of total flight time in a career lasting from 1942-74. Serving as a SAR pilot in **Port Angeles** from 1954-58, he was awarded the US Air Medal for multiple successful SAR cases. Later, he served as Captain of the Port in Honolulu and in Seattle, Chief of Intelligence in D14, as well as Chief of Reserves in D14, D9 and D13.

Sources

Photos & documents from Hazel Gershowitz
Background documents at CG History Library
Tom Beard, Wonderful Flying Machines
Capt John Waters Jr, Rescue at Sea
Arthur Percy, Coast Guard Aviation

Footnotes

- 1... Percy, p.58
- 2... Beard, p.58
- 3... Beard, p.129

