

Coast Guard

Shield of Freedom



April
2004



TANKER



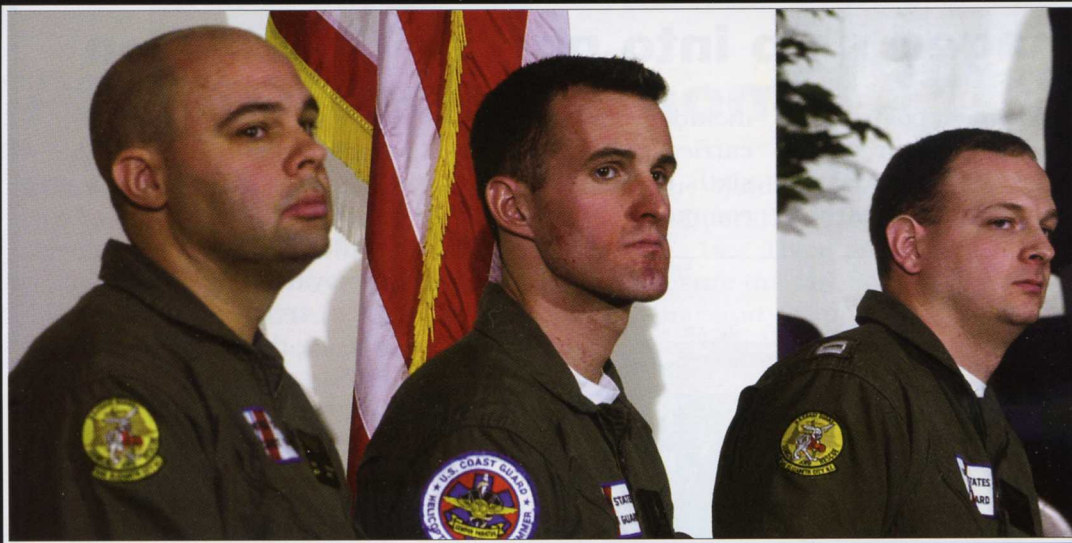
DOWN

Coast Guard units respond when a 570-foot
tanker explodes off the coast of Virginia.

Ferry horror

Hazmat response

Dog discovery



AN EXPLOSION AND A RESCUE *Top:* From left to right, AET2 Sam Pulliam, AST3 Dave Foreman, and Lt. Eric Bader sit during a press conference on the explosion of the Bow Mariner Feb 29. These men are part of the rescue crew that saved six survivors after the explosion sank the Bow Mariner (right photo), a commercial tanker carrying 3.5 million gallons of industrial ethanol, off of the coast of Chincoteague, Va., Feb. 28.

Story by PA2 Krystyna Hannum, LantArea

The foreign accent was filled with urgency and terror and demanded immediate attention.

"Bow Mariner, Bow Mariner. We are on fire, we are on fire! Mayday, mayday, mayday. This is Bow Mariner, Bow Mariner, we are on fire. Mayday, mayday, mayday, this is Bow Mariner, we are on fire, we are on fire!"

At Coast Guard Group Eastern Shore in Chincoteague, Va., OS1 Christopher Wheeler attempted to make radio contact with the frightened voice, but his calls went unanswered while various marine vessels radioed the Coast Guard about a vessel in distress. Information poured over the radio, and Wheeler was able to piece together that an explosion had occurred off shore. Expecting a mass casualty, Wheeler and other watch standers got on the phones to get as many assets as possible to assist.

In the brief minutes following the alert, the Coast Guard learned that the vessel's name was Bow Mariner, a 570-foot Singapore-flagged tanker, en route from Linden, N.J., to Houston, carrying 3.5 million gallons of industrial ethanol. It had been about 50 miles east of Chincoteague, Va., Feb. 28 when an explosion fatally injured it.

Farther south in North Carolina, most of the aircrew at Air Station Elizabeth City had finished dinner and was relaxing in the crew's duty lounge. AET2 Sam Pulliam and AMT3 Jeremy McMullen were among them when the pulsing "whoop, whoop" of the SAR alarm rang throughout the building.

"Now, ready helo crew. Boat on fire off the coast of Chincoteague," came the watch stander's broadcast. The duty HH-60 Jayhawk crew, including Pulliam, two pilots and a rescue swimmer, raced to their helicopter and prepared to launch.

Minutes later, the alarm sounded again, yet this time without a broadcast, and when McMullen, who was on the C-130 Hercules crew, saw his pilot run by, he knew that they too were going to launch. He grabbed his bag and dashed out to the plane. Twenty-one minutes after the alarm, the plane was airborne.

Meanwhile, the commanding officer of the 87-foot CGC Albacore, at anchor for the night in the mouth of Delaware Bay, received word that they were diverting to assist. He directed the crew to haul anchor and set a course for the position.

AST3 Zee Lee was sitting down to dinner when the SAR alarm at Air
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TANKER DOWN





MASS RESPONSE *Top:* A map showing the mid-Atlantic region from which nine Coast Guard units assisted in the search and rescue operation for the Bow Mariner. *Below:* OS1 Christopher Wheeler was on watch when he received the mayday call from the vessel.

Station Atlantic City sounded. Lee quickly learned of the possible burn victims and chemicals present and prepared the cabin of the HH-65 Dolphin helicopter with extra burn victim medical gear. The helicopter went airborne with Lee and three more crew members and sped toward the Bow Mariner.

With a faster air speed, the Hercules plane won the race to the scene. McMullen, looking through an infrared lens, panned the camera down and couldn't believe what he saw. The stern of a ship was sticking out of the water, the rest already beneath the water's surface.

"This thing's going down," McMullen reported to the pilot.

Flying over the sinking ship, McMullen spotted a covered life raft. Zooming in with the camera, McMullen examined the screen, looking for evidence of any survivors. He concluded that someone had to have set up the life raft and was possibly inside it. The Hercules radioed to the Jayhawk, still 15 minutes away, to check it out when they arrived.

The Dolphin helicopter crew from Atlantic City appeared moments later and immediately began searching for survivors, focusing its attention to the rapidly receding superstructure. Amazingly, lights still burned brightly inside the condemned ship, but as Lee and the crew drew closer, the lights flickered twice before becoming as dark as the surrounding water and sky. Searching for anyone who might be clinging to the ship, the Dolphin hovered nearby. The crew saw no one.

At 7:30 p.m., as rescuers watched in silence, the last section of the Bow Mariner slipped below the surface and made its voyage to the ocean bottom.

Above the scene at five thousand feet, the Hercules took on the role of on-scene commander. Searching with a powerful C-130 Airborne Sensor Palletized Electronic Reconnaissance camera, McMullen spotted possible areas with survivors while his fellow crewmembers vectored in the helicopters.

The Jayhawk reached the life raft and confirmed there were men inside. However, the pilot was hesitant to lower the rescue swimmer, AST3 Dave Foreman, into the chemicals and oil that had escaped from the fractured ship. Pulliam, operating the hoists, dropped the basket next to the raft hoping the men would get into it on their own. When they made no attempts to leave their raft, it became clear the swimmer would have to go in.

The first four trips of the basket went quickly, although as each survivor entered the cabin of the Jayhawk, the air became more pungent with the smell of ethanol, and the decks more slick from the oil. Although Pulliam was attached to the helicopter with a harness, the survivors weren't, and he realized that one wrong move and one of them might slide out of the open door to the water 70 feet below.

There were only two men left in the raft as Pulliam



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readied the stokes litter for a man with a possible back injury. After the fifth survivor was raised to the Jayhawk, Pulliam wrestled him into the cabin. Disconnecting the litter, Pulliam reattached the basket and sent it down one last time.

As he watched the basket rise, Pulliam thought that the swimmer had been mentally affected by the fumes and had placed a black bag in the basket. As the basket reached the cabin door, Pulliam realized the "bag" was a person so completely covered in oil that not even the whites of his eyes or teeth showed.

Once the swimmer was aboard, the pilots turned the Jayhawk's nose southwest and headed to the hospital. During the hour transit, Pulliam, not wanting to move the severely hypothermic man more than necessary, held on to the basket atop the litter so that it would not crush the man still in the litter. To prevent the man in the basket from falling into sleep, a dangerous situation for a hypothermic victim, Pulliam jostled, poked or pinched him each time he closed his eyes, but each time the man would respond aggressively, ensuing mini-skirmishes in the already tight quarters. It took nearly an hour before the helicopter landed at Norfolk Sentara Hospital in Virginia.

Back at the search area, a large field of debris and pollution made the search for more survivors difficult. During the Jayhawk crew's rescue of the six survivors, the Dolphin's crew found an additional person. Lee was dropped into the oil-coated water.

Once in, Lee cautiously swam toward the man and

HEROES IN THE SKY Coast Guardsmen such as AMT3 Jeremy McMullen, aboard a C-130 plane (bottom photo), and AET2 Sam Pulliam (top photo) helped in the massive search and rescue efforts. McMullen located the raft with the only six survivors from the tragedy.





USCG



USCG



USCG

WHAT REMAINS *Upper left:* A fire-damaged lifeboat from the Bow Mariner drifts Feb. 29 after the vessel sank the night before off the coast of Chincoteague, Va. *Left and upper right:* A crew from the CGC Shearwater approaches a capsized lifeboat from the Bow Mariner.

aboard the partially submerged boat. The front and back ends of the lifeboat had been blown away, and a man was clinging to the side of it — alive.

The fishermen hauled the man onto the Capt. Bucky Smith as the

worried that he was already deceased. When he saw the man move his arm slightly, Lee immediately clipped him into his own sling and directed the flight mechanic to hoist them up together.

With difficulty, the oil-soaked pair struggled into the helicopter. Lee checked the man for a pulse and couldn't find one. As the helicopter sped toward the nearest hospital, Lee and the flight mechanic began CPR. The oil in the cabin complicated efforts, making the use of oxygen not possible. Lee began administering mouth-to-mouth resuscitation while the flight mechanic started compressions.

The Dolphin was well on its way to Maryland when a second Jayhawk helicopter from Elizabeth City and a 47-foot motor lifeboat from Station Chincoteague arrived at the debris field. The eyes high above in the Hercules plane were still directing the Coast Guard and civilian assets to various search areas when McMullen spotted a person on a lifeboat. The Jayhawk's crew was already with the lifeboat but was unable to see the man. A nearby commercial fishing vessel, the Capt. Bucky Smith, came alongside and two fishermen jumped

Jayhawk's crew lowered AST3 Joel Sayers. Sayers checked the man, who was alert and talking, although there was a language barrier. Sayers prepared the hoist from the hovering Jayhawk, and when he returned to the man, he realized that he had stopped breathing. Sayers and the fishermen quickly strapped the man in the litter and hoisted him, followed by the rescue swimmer.

Sayers and the flight mechanic performed CPR on the man as the helo raced to the hospital. However, the man never regained consciousness and was pronounced deceased. The man Lee plucked from the water later succumbed to his injuries as well.

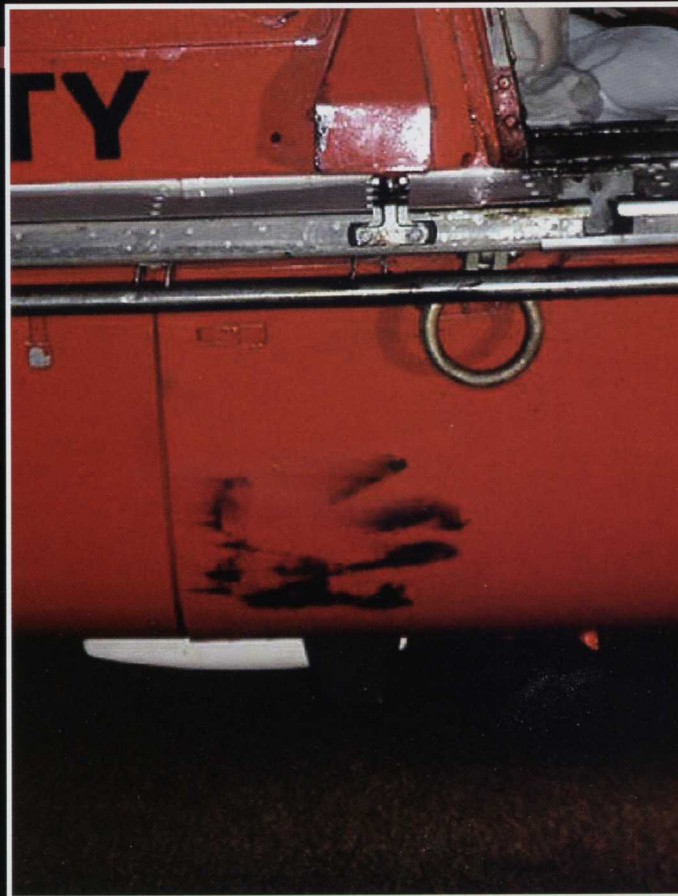
A fishing vessel on scene recovered one other deceased crewmember from the Bow Mariner who was later transferred to the Albacore and brought back to Norfolk. The six men who had been found in the life raft were the only survivors of the 27-member Filipino and Greek crew from the Bow Mariner. Although the Coast Guard continued searching for more than 40 hours, 18 crewmembers remained missing days later.

"It is my sincere hope the friends and family know w

did everything in our power to find their loved ones," said Rear Adm. Sally Brice-O'Hara, commander of the 5th District.

In response, Brice-O'Hara received an E-mail that read: "In a situation like this, it is easy for relatives to forget the 'real' heroes. As a relative of the ship's captain, I wish to [thank] the USCG for their tireless efforts in trying to find the remaining bodies of the Bow Mariner. And further to Sally Brice-O'Hara's statement, I believe that you have done everything in your power to recover the bodies. Once again, thank you and GOD SPEED." 🙏

OILY RETURNS *Right:* Soiled from jumping in oil-thick waters, AST3 Zee Lee, from Air Station Atlantic City left his mark on the helicopter as he returned inside the craft after pulling a Bow Mariner crewmember from the ocean. *Bottom:* Fireman Micheal Lake from Station Chincoteague holds a strobe recovered from the Bow Mariner during search efforts.



PA2 Kristina Harwood, L.A.S.P.R.E.A.