

Association for Rescue at Sea  
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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

## **ASSOCIATION FOR RESCUE AT SEA ANNUAL AWARD CEREMONY - 2005**

On 4 October, 2005 on Capitol Hill, Washington, D. C., the Association for Rescue at Sea (AFRAS), will award the AFRAS Gold Medal, three AFRAS Silver Medals, and the Amver plaque for heroic rescues made in 2004. The award ceremony and reception will be co-hosted by The Honorable Howard Coble, co-Chairman, U.S. Congressional Coast Guard Caucus. The Gold Medal will go to United States Coast Guardsman **Gregory Gibbons**, Aviation Maintenance Technician Third Class; the Silver Medals will be awarded to United States Coast Guard Auxiliaries **Jay P. Croy**, his wife **Linda R. Croy** and **Richard J. Runde**; the Amver plaque will be presented to the captain and crew of the Carnival Cruise Ship **HOLIDAY**.

### ***GOLD MEDAL***

Gold Medal awardee Gregory Gibbons who is stationed at Coast Guard Station Kodiak was serving with a helicopter Aviation Detachment with USCG HH-65B NR 6513 aboard the USCG Cutter *Alex Haley*. The cutter along with two USCG HH-60J helicopters had been working to rescue the crew of the M/V *Seledang Ayu*, a 738-foot freighter hopelessly adrift in very heavy weather in the Bering Sea. Already the two other helos had rescued 18 of the 26 persons on board, but as they departed the scene to refuel, the master reported the ship was aground, taking on water rapidly and all were in extreme peril of drowning. Conditions were such that there needed to be an immediate evacuation of the remaining persons on board. The aviation detachment aboard the *Alex Haley* were the only remaining rescue assets, but 25-30 foot seas and wind gusts as high as 45 knots made launch of a helicopter from the deck of the cutter highly problematical.

Nevertheless, the pilot and aviation detachment decided to risk a launch since others were in such peril aboard the freighter. During the *Alex Haley* helo's transit to the scene, HH-60J NR 6020 returned from refueling. It was decided that because it could take eight survivors at once, NR 6020 would proceed with the rescue and NR 6513 would stand by to assist as necessary. But after rescuing the first seven survivors, suddenly and without warning, a gigantic wave hit the bow of the

*Selendang Ayu*, sending a huge wall of water into the air. NR 6020 was engulfed in the water and went crashing into the sea as the crew of CGNR 6513 watched in horror.

The standby helo NR 6513 from the cutter *Alex Haley* rapidly reacted with AMT3 Gibbons rigging the rescue basket for hoisting while the pilot LT Tim Eason moved the helicopter into position for the rescue from a 150 foot hover to avoid additional waves. Throughout the rescue operation, AMT3 Gibbons told the pilot precisely where he wanted the helo positioned and thus was able to position the rescue basket so accurately that they were able to put it within arm's length of the survivors, including a severely hypothermic, unresponsive member of the ship's crew. All of the observable persons—including the pilot, copilot and flight mechanic of the CGNR 6020 were safely hoisted aboard, but the ship's master and the rescue swimmer from GCNR 6020 were still on the ship and six other members of ship's crew could not be located. (Note that NR 6513 did not carry a rescue swimmer, so the rescue basket was the only hoist means available and AMT3 Gibbons played a critical role in this whole operation).

After breaking off to refuel at Dutch Harbor, CGNR 6513 managed to return through mountainous terrain and very heavy weather to find the ship now broken in two, covered in heavy fuel oil, and the master and the USCG rescue swimmer remaining on the unlit, powerless bow section. Hoisting at 200 feet through heavy snow that sometimes reduced visibility to zero, the crew of NR 6513 persisted and eventually retrieved both the master and the swimmer. With both survivors in good health, the crew continued to search for additional survivors until low fuel dictated they depart the scene.

Thanks to AMT3 Gibbons' skillful and courageous performance as a flight mechanic along with the rest of the crew on CGNR 6513, 6 lives were saved, including the four from the downed CGNR 6020, in conditions so marginal that it was a miracle they were even able to fly.

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### **SILVER MEDAL**

USCG Auxiliarist Jay P. Croy, coxswain; his wife Linda R. Croy and Richard J. Runde, crew; were onboard a USCG Auxiliary Facility (a 20 foot Grady White with cuddy cabin and I/O engine) performing a regatta patrol at the 33<sup>rd</sup> Annual Leech Lake Regatta in Walker, MN last August. Leech

Lake is a 460 square mile lake known for unpredictable weather, including strong winds and high seas. On Walker Lake, as in many other large internal lakes of the US, there is no USCG presence other than the USCG Auxiliary.

On the second day of the regatta there were 10-15 knots winds and 3 foot seas. The local Auxiliary Patrol Commander decided to deploy his two facilities near Pelican Island at the farthest end of the race course where they could rapidly respond to any crisis that arose. Conditions worsened during the race and by the time the last participant had rounded the race buoy off Pelican Island, the winds were 15-20 knots with gusts as high as 35 knots and 4 foot seas. The two USCG Auxiliary facilities began their slow trek back to base following the regatta participants in, but noted that one of the sailboats had veered away from the course and appeared to be disoriented. Coxswain Croy brought his facility alongside the 25-foot scow *Wind Dancer* to find the crew (only two of whom were wearing life jackets) to be in distress from the ardors of racing in 57 degree weather in such heavy winds and seas. The scow's crew were judged to be suffering from hypothermia, with one member being "incapacitated" and the other "impaired"; all members of the scow's crew were now just hanging on inside the boat.

Coxswain Croy decided to take the sailboat in tow despite the walls of water coming over his bow and conditions worse than he had ever encountered in his twenty years of experience as an Auxiliarist. The problem was to maneuver close enough to "cross the T" and pass a line to the exhausted crew. Coxswain Croy was able to make a successful pass on the first try and crew members Runde and Linda Croy floated a survival pack of extra life jackets plus a thermal blanket back to the *Wind Dancer*. As coxswain Croy worked to keep the bow of his facility into the waves and to maintain a proper tow, his crew members kept up a steady conversation over the radio to reassure the sailors. The 3.5 mile tow to the nearest marina took one hour and fifteen minutes due to the high winds and 4 to 6 foot seas. Once into calmer waters, the two hypothermic sailors were transferred to the cuddy of the Auxiliary facility, stripped of their wet clothing and given dry clothing and anti-exposure coveralls.

The Auxiliary crew attended to the physical and psychological needs of the crew of the *Wind Dancer* throughout the rescue until the sailors were turned over to emergency medical personnel at Leech Lake Marina.

The skillful response of these three volunteers is most heartily commended and is in keeping with the highest traditions of the United States

Coast Guard and Coast Guard Auxiliary.

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### **AMVER AWARD**

On the night of 21 August, 2004, the Carnival Cruise Ship HOLIDAY was steaming through the Yucatan Straits in the Gulf of Mexico when two crew members came to the bridge to report that they thought they had heard a cry for help while standing on a weather deck. The bridge conning officer immediately instituted man over board (MOB) procedures, stopped the ship and called the captain to the bridge. The captain then reversed course and ran back down the GPS track to the MOB position shown on the screen.

The ship's crew and passengers were mustered but no one was reported missing as the ship continued to search the dark waters for anyone who may have been lost from another vessel. About 45 minutes later, two persons were located off the port side of the ship and brought on board. But, they reported there were three additional persons in the water. The HOLIDAY's lifeboat continued to search for additional survivors until almost three hours after the initial report of a possible call for help, when the three additional survivors were located and recovered. Of the last three recovered, one was a ten year old boy and another was his 39 year old father who was not wearing a life jacket but was clinging to a piece of wood. The five survivors were from a Mexican fishing boat and, save being slightly hypothermic, were in good shape.

AFRAS is impressed with the fact that not only was this rescue a miracle, it was conducted very professionally and represents one of the greatest traditions of the sea—a willingness to come to the aid of others in distress. Five very lucky fishermen are alive today because Captain D'Aita was ready to stop his ship and carry out a three and one half hour diversion from course to conduct search and rescue operations with the help of his crew.

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The Association for Rescue at Sea (AFRAS) is a non-profit foundation with charitable status, which supports services concerned with saving lives at sea. The Gold Medal presentation was established in 1982 and the medal is presented annually to an enlisted member of the United States Coast Guard for an act of extraordinary bravery during a rescue at sea. AFRAS established the Silver Medal in 2000 (silver to denote the uniform markings of a CG Auxiliarist as opposed to the gold of the USCG) and it is presented

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when a Coast Guard Auxiliarist performs a rescue under the same criteria as that for an enlisted Coast Guard person. The AFRAS Amver award was established in 1996 to recognize the contribution of seamen in ships at sea to the safety of their fellow mariners. Nominations for all awards are made by the USCG's Search and Rescue Division.

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