



AFRAS Newsletter

Association for Rescue at Sea, Inc.

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Fall 2004

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(KNRM)

Letter from the President

This has indeed been a busy time for AFRAS. First, our secretary, Anne Kifer and her family have moved to Door County, WI and our office moved with her. I have moved to Colonial Beach, VA. (See last page of this Newsletter for the details).

One of our greatest achievements this year was finally to close the book on our campaign to raise funds to purchase a new lifeboat for the RNLI. On 25 August 2004, I traveled to Poole to name one of the new D-class inshore lifeboats "Semper Paratus" and it was quite the ceremony. Our British friends always do things up right. We were also represented by our past president, David Chomeau, who got this project started several years ago; one of our major donors, Bronson Fargo of the Hart Foundation; and our good friend and member of the AFRAS International Advisory Group Alexandra Hewitt-Jones of VISAR.

While in Poole, I had ample opportunity to talk with Ian Ventham of the RNLI and Gerry Keeling of the ILF. AFRAS has adjusted its course slightly and is now focusing on support of the ILF, while at the same time not forgetting our dear friends in the RNLI, VISAR, ICE-SAR and others. We will continue to work hard on the Caribbean Initiative and one of the first orders of business will be to help the ILF come up with an agreed upon set of competency-based training guidelines to be used by start-up and small lifeboat organizations such as many of those found in the Caribbean.

Fundraising has become a priority concern. Not only will the ILF support initiative demand new sources of funding, we find ourselves barely able to keep up with administrative expenses such as postage, phone bills, and printing. Anne Kifer is our only paid, part-time employee. All the other officers and directors work *pro-bono*, but we find that despite efforts to increase our membership base, the funds needed to meet our routine bills are not sufficient. In addition, of course, we want to be able to continue our primary focus of raising funds here in the USA to support worthy lifeboat causes overseas. We have agonized these issues for over a year and are currently working on several fundraising schemes to help us find a way to meet current expenses and expand our donor base. After careful consideration of various alternatives, we have decided that it is no longer feasible to pass on 100% of our restricted gifts to overseas lifeboat services and others. We will now withhold 5% of such gifts to help defray our administrative costs. Again, we thank you for your generous support in the past and hope that you understand that we have to take this step to remain solvent.

On a more positive note, AFRAS had another great year with its Gold and AMVER awards in September plus two special awards made for heroic rescues by those one would not normally expect to be involved in such: the Naval Reserve Center in Baltimore and the cruise liner *Holiday*. We regret to announce several key resignations from our board of directors who have given great support to AFRAS over the years: VADM John Finneran, ADM Owen Siler, Ronald Anderson, and Henri Chomeau IV.

-John Chomeau, President

AFRAS Award Ceremony 2004



AMVER Plaque awardee M/T STOLT CAPABILITY

Gold Medal Awardee LAURENCE NETTLES, USCG

On 15 September, 2004 in Washington, D. C., the Association for Rescue at Sea (AFRAS) held its annual award ceremony on Capitol Hill. This splendid event was co-hosted by the honorable Howard Coble, United States Congressman, North Carolina and co-Chairman, U.S. Congressional Coast Guard Caucus.

GOLD MEDAL AWARD

AFRAS presented its Gold Medal and a cash prize to United States Coast Guardsman Laurence D. Nettles, Aviation Survival Technician Third Class for a heroic rescue on 30 June, 2003. Petty Officer Nettles was serving as rescue swimmer aboard a Coast Guard helicopter during the rescue of four fishermen 40 miles south of Houma, Louisiana in Tropical Storm Bill. Heavy rain showers and strong winds were pounding the New Orleans area ahead of the approaching storm. The harsh weather overtook several commercial fishing vessels near Timbalier Island.

An emergency beacon signal was detected by the Eighth Coast Guard District approximately ten miles southeast of Timbalier Island and a helicopter was launched with Petty Officer Nettles as rescue swimmer to locate and assist if able. By this time, Tropical Storm Bill was less than 10 miles offshore.

During their first search, winds were 40 knots and visibility ½ mile. The crew completed its initial search for the vessel and repositioned to another probable location just offshore. Upon reaching the second location, the crew of CG6514 overheard a mayday call from F/V SAINT JOSEPH to Coast Guard Station Grand Isle. The vessel reported its pumps were unable to keep up with flooding and sinking with four persons on board. The helicopter quickly diverted to their reported position, 15 nautical miles away, near the east end of Timbalier Island, Louisiana. As the helo headed westward towards the eye of Tropical Storm Bill, winds increased to 50 knots, the ceiling dropped to 200 feet, and visibility decreased to 1/8 mile.



Admiral Thomas Collins, Commandant, U.S. Coast Guard, left, alongside AFRAS Chairman, VADM Roger Rufe and Laurence Nettles.

AFRAS Award Ceremony 2004



Petty Officer Nettles tells his audience that without his crew, including flight mechanic Lajeunesse, right, the rescue would not have been possible.

Petty Officer Nettles twice reconnected to the rescue hoist and was repositioned near the SAINT JOSEPH, expending considerable effort in the process.

While the helicopter crew moved in to hoist the third survivor, a 25-foot breaking wave completely submerged Nettles and the survivor. The helicopter crew lost sight of them for about 15 seconds until the surf settled. The wave washed Petty Office Nettles and the survivor approximately 50 feet down swell. Amazingly, when he emerged from the wave, Nettles still had a grip on the survivor. That same wave almost capsized the F/V SAINT JOSEPH, putting its port rail and deck underwater.

Dauntless in the face of increasingly ominous conditions and unfazed by the onset of severe fatigue, Petty Officer Nettles steadfastly pressed on and completed the rescue of the two remaining survivors. Petty Officer Nettles' intrepidity, stamina, and determination in treacherous conditions were instrumental in the saving of four lives, and were in keeping in the highest traditions of the United States Coast Guard and those who risk their own lives to save others at sea.

AMVER PLAQUE

The Association for Rescue at Sea was also pleased to present its AMVER plaque to the captain and crew of M/T STOLT CAPABILITY, a 600-foot, specialized tanker. On 21 October 2003, off Vietnam, STOLT CAPABILITY received a call on VHF Channel 16, reporting a vessel sinking about 8 miles from the ship's position. The Captain came to the bridge and altered course toward the vessel in distress. Deck hands were called and other crew put on standby. The ship then received a Digital Select Call (DSC) distress alert from the HOANG DAT 35. The Captain made contact with the stricken ship via VHF radio. The ship reported 16 crew members.

Vice Admiral Roger Rufe, AFRAS Chairman, left, along with Rick Kenney of AMVER, right, presents the AMVER plaque to Christopher Zukowski, general manager Shipowning Americas VP, center, on behalf of M/T STOLT CAPABILITY.



When the crew reached the F/V SAINT JOSEPH the vessel was dead in the water with all four crewmen out on deck awaiting rescue. Seas whipped to 20 feet by the tropical storm's now 60-knot winds slammed broadside into the foundering vessel. With rear decks already awash, the F/V SAINT JOSEPH rolled well past 30 degrees in the heavy seas eliminating direct hoists to the vessel as a rescue option. After conferring with the Pilot-In-Command, Petty Officer Nettles opted to deploy into the sea near the vessel and have the crew of the fishing vessel jump overboard one at a time for recovery.

After deploying within 25 feet of the vessel, Petty Officer Nettles directed the first crewman to jump into the water. Fighting the 20 foot waves with breaking tops and blowing spray, Nettles towed the first survivor clear of the boat and placed him in the rescue basket. The subsequent recoveries using this same method required increasing skill and stamina from Petty Officer Nettles. Because wave action repeatedly separated him from the vessel,

Seas whipped to 20 feet by the tropical storm's now 60-knot winds slammed broadside into the foundering vessel.

AFRAS Award Ceremony 2004

AMVER PLAQUE (Cont.)

On arrival, STOLT CAPABILITY noticed the vessel was listing heavily to her port side. With winds at approximately 30 knots and seas at Force 5, the tanker maneuvered as close as possible to the sinking vessel. The crew began to abandon ship. A first group of nine persons was sighted in the water and recovered, then three more. Two more crewmen were sighted along the port side, but were not responding and appeared unconscious. Upon recovery, the Chief Officer and Medical team reported there were no signs of life after applying CPR and first aid.

Rescue Coordination Center Hong Kong then designated STOLT CAPABILITY as on-scene coordinator for search and rescue of the 2 remaining crew. A search plan was coordinated with other ships arriving on scene. One additional crew member was sighted in the water and recovered. For approximately 10 hours, four ships conducted area search patterns with no signs of the last remaining crew member. STOLT CAPABILITY proceeded to the nearest port, Nha Trang, and disembarked the rescued seafarers. Captain Ivan Vukovic remarked: "We all feel flattered and proud in serving to best professional standards in the maritime industry, and it is our responsibility to maintain that level and help anyone out at sea when in distress."

AFRAS salutes Captain Vukovic and the crew of M/T STOLT CAPABILITY for responding in the tradition of AMVER and for coordinating this extensive and successful rescue.

"We all feel flattered and proud in serving to best professional standards in the maritime industry, and it is our responsibility to maintain that level and help anyone out at sea when in distress."

Captain Ivan Vukovic
M/T STOLT CAPABILITY



Admiral Thomas Collins congratulates AFRAS award winners M/T STOLT CAPABILITY, represented by Christopher Zukowski, left, and Laurence Nettles, U.S. Coast Guard, right.

MIRACLE!

AFRAS awarded a special plaque to the Carnival Cruise Line ship “*Holiday*” in New Orleans on 4 October in recognition of a truly miraculous rescue made by the cruise liner.

The *Holiday* was sailing in the Yucatan Straits during the night of 21 August, 2004

when some passengers and two of the crewmembers standing on a weather deck aft heard what

they believed could have been a cry for help. Chief Electrician Pavic and Third Engineer Vincetic immediately went to bridge at 8:32PM to report that they were not sure, but they thought they had heard some screaming from the sea. The bridge conning officer Mladina did not hesitate and immediately hit the “Man Overboard” button on the ship’s GPS plotter, released the port side MOB smoke and light signal and a life-ring, while at the same time slowed the ship and called Captain Orazio D’Aita to the bridge. The captain also did not hesitate to turn the ship around and to initiate man overboard procedures, including a muster of the crew and passengers. A “Pan Pan” call (signaling distress, but not yet a serious threat to life like a “Mayday”) was issued over the radio. The ship proceeded carefully back along its track to the GPS position of the reported MOB and by 9:15 PM the forward lookouts reported hearing screams coming from the water. The strong ship’s search light illuminated two persons in the water off the port side of the ship.

A rescue tender was launched with ship’s officers Mazi and Collela aboard and by 9:22 had recovered two Mexicans who were in good condition, but were taken directly to ship’s infirmary for evaluation and treatment. The two survivors, however, reported that there were three other survivors out there, so the

not wearing a life jacket (PFD) but was clinging to a piece of wood. These three were also treated in the infirmary where it was discovered that they were slightly hypothermic. The survivors were from a recreational fishing boat that had sunk suddenly more than nine hours prior to the arrival of the *Holiday*. The survivors

were transferred to a Mexican Coast Guard cutter and the cruise liner continued on to its scheduled port call in New Orleans.

They could hear cries for help, but in the haze and at night could not determine the direction they were coming from.

search continued.

The rescue boat proceeded in an expanding circle away from the ship in waves of about 5 feet high and haze. The officers ran for several minutes along the course directed by

This rescue was not only miraculous, it also reflects the greatest traditions of the sea – including the willingness of sailors to come to the aid of others in distress. *Holiday* participates in the voluntary AMVER alerting system where the US Coast Guard asks participating ships to divert from course to come to the rescue of others.



Since this was a “come upon” and *Holiday* was the only ship on scene, it served quite effectively as the on-scene search coordinator and rescuer. AFRAS was most impressed with first the decision to stop the ship and initiate man

overboard procedures on the basis of a report of “I thought I heard screams from the sea”, and the professionalism of the bridge watch and the rescue boat crew in carrying out the search. 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 operations.

the *Holiday* and then stopped to listen. They could hear cries for help, but in the haze and at night could not determine the direction they were coming from. Finally, almost precisely three hours after the initial report of screams from the water, the other three survivors were located and brought aboard the rescue tender. One was a ten year old boy and another – his 39 year old father – was

Semper Paratus!

On 25 August in Poole, England AFRAS presented a new, D-class inshore lifeboat to the Royal National Lifeboat Institution (RNLI) of Great Britain. The lifeboat was purchased from funds contributed to AFRAS by American donors supporting the RNLI. The name, *Semper Paratus* was chosen in recognition of the close association between the U.S. Coast Guard and the RNLI.

It was a beautiful day and the RNLI did things up properly as usual. AFRAS was well represented by David Chomeau, former AFRAS president; John Chomeau, current president of AFRAS; Bronson Fargo who represented the Hart Foundation -- one of the largest contributors to the lifeboat campaign and a great friend of the RNLI and AFRAS; and Alexandra Hewitt-Jones, the executive administrator of Virgin Islands Search and Rescue (VISAR), another major recipient of AFRAS support.

The new version of the D-class inshore lifeboat (IB1) #635 "*Semper Paratus*" was named in front of the new RNLI College that was dedicated by H.M.

Queen Elisabeth II on 28 July 2004. This was to be the first RNLI naming ceremony to be conducted at the new College. After Captain Chomeau poured champagne over the bow and the chaplain blessed the boat it was lowered into the water. An RNLI crew put it through its paces for those attending the ceremony. Mr. Ian Ventham of the RNLI tells us that the nature of lifeboat rescues is changing and the majority of their rescues are now made quite close to shore -- mainly windsurfers and swimmers on inflatables who get into trouble. *Semper Paratus*, therefore, is a good match for current RNLI priorities.



RNLI D-Class Lifeboat

- Improved version of Inshore D-Class first introduced in 1963
- Ideal for rescues close to shore
- 4.95 meters (16 feet, 3 inches) in length/2 meters (6 feet, 7 inches) in beam
- Operates at 20 plus knots
- Rigid hull inflatable
- Can be righted manually by its 3-man crew after capsize



HEROIC RESCUE BY NAVAL RESERVISTS

In recognition of a truly heroic rescue of 23 survivors from a capsized water taxi in Baltimore's Inner Harbor, AFRAS made its first-ever award for heroism to a command other than an individual/ship and also its first such award to a US Navy unit. The Naval Reservists were just finishing their weekend drill at the Reserve Center on the Inner Harbor and were securing for the day, when a couple of the members noticed a water taxi with 25 persons capsize in a sudden squall. Without hesitation the Naval Reservists got their LCM-8 landing craft underway (with a makeshift crew and without any special rescue gear other than a few blankets) and headed out to the capsized boat. Once there, they lowered the ramp on the landing craft to provide easier access to the survivors, but most were caught under the canvas top of the water taxi. With hesitation, several of the reservists jumped into the freezing water and started pulling survivors out from under the boat. The LCM's coxswain did some quick thinking and used the LCM's bow ramp to lift the water taxi's catamaran hull partially out of the water to provide ever better access to the survivors. The survivors were provided blankets and cared for in the well of the landing craft and by the Baltimore Fire Department boats that had also arrived on the scene. The reservists who had entered the water all had to be treated for hypothermia. Medical personnel from the Naval Reserve Center—who also just happened to be drilling that weekend—set up a triage center in their building, sending out the most seriously injured to waiting ambulances first. Not only was this rescue heroic, it was truly lucky. If it had happened 15

minutes later, most of the reservists would have already been on their way home, many of the reservists who went out to make the rescue were not trained in small boat rescue, and the LCM had just returned from the previous week from a lengthy overhaul.

AFRAS made a presentation of a suitable plaque to the Naval Reserve Center on 17 April 2004 in what has become a new program of recognition of heroic rescues on the part of those not in the rescue business. This then is an adjunct to our Gold Medal awarded to an enlisted member of the USCG, the Silver Medal to a USCG Auxiliarist and the AMVER award to a merchant ship that diverts from course to make a rescue. Our second such plaque was awarded to the cruise liner *Holiday* in New Orleans on 4 October. (See accompanying article on page 5.)



AFRAS has moved!

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KNRM FOLLOW UP

The Spring 2002 issue of the AFRAS Newsletter featured a heroic rescue by KNRM crews in the IJmuiden/Wijk aan Zee region of the Netherlands on 4 September 2001. We recently received news from the KNRM that two of the lifeboat crewmembers had received the prestigious Silver Honors Medal for Humanitarian Assistance (to go with the silver medals they got from the KNRM). This special medal was awarded to crewmembers Ton Haasnoot and Rob DeBoer by the Dutch Section for Civil Orders upon further review of a rescue in which the lifeboat crew showed immense courage, great insight and caution, and a good bit of self-sacrifice in making a truly heroic rescue of three persons being blown upon the breakwater at the harbor entrance.

AFRAS would like to extend its admiration and gratitude to Haasnoot and De Boer for this great rescue effort and our congratulations for the official recognition on the part of the Netherlands government.