

Speaker: David F. Cooper

Date Recorded: 10-26-2016

David F. Cooper, Lieutenant Commander, U.S. Coast Guard, retired. I began my Coast Guard career at OCS in Yorktown in 1968. After graduating there and being commissioned as an ensign by my father, who was a retired Marine colonel, I went to New Castle, New Hampshire and reported aboard the U.S. Coast Guard Cutter Active (WMEC-618), a 210.

I served aboard the Active for a year and a half, during which time, I was qualified as a landing signals officer, and we did a lot of cases where we would be driving out to assist a boat sinking through the rough seas, pounding, and watch a helicopter go by, drop them some pumps, and then they'd be driving back by us on the way home, and they'd say, "Okay, the floodings under control. You can go slower and escort them in." So I said, "These guys go out and do the hard work, get the credit, and they go home and have a beer. That sounds better than doing this," so I applied for flight training and attended flight training from July of 1970 and graduated in May of 1971.

I then went to A.V. TRAC in Mobile and transitioned to the H-52 helicopter, and then reported to my first duty section in Houston, Texas. I served there two years and was designated an aircraft commander after a year of upgrade. I was the only non-aircraft commander there, so they all wanted to go out and show the new guy how to fly, so it was nice that I got all the training flights I needed to upgrade.

That qualified me when the Coast Guard was looking for pilots for the exchange program with the United States Air Force flying rescue helicopters in Southeast Asia. Mike McCormick and I were the two selected to go over there, mostly because we were H-52 pilots, so they didn't want to take any H-3 pilots, because they wanted the Air Force to train us into being multi-engine helicopter pilots. So we went over there, flew the H-53 during a period when there was some flying activity, but we didn't know it, but we were sitting alert in case somebody got shot down doing something over there. But unfortunately for us, and fortunately for the other pilots, as nobody got shot down, so it was kind of a quiet tour.

Coming out of there, I got my first choice in the United States Coast Guard Air Station at Cape Cod, Massachusetts. I went there, and since I'd been flying H-52s, I quickly requalified in that, and after about six months, they sent me to a Fam course in the H-3, which didn't designate me as anything when I finished it at Mobile, but I worked my way through the syllabus at the air station, and I was an aircraft commander in both the H-52 and the H-3, and I was a standardization officer in the H-52.

After four years at Cape Cod, I went to Brooklyn. I enjoyed the flying there, but I'm not a city person, so I did not enjoy the assignment much, and after three years there, during which I did a lot of deploying on different missions down in the Caribbean for a drug interdiction for the Haitian Migration Interdiction Ops and for the Mariel boatlift rescue operations that they did out NAS Key West.

Anyway, I went back to Cape Cod, and the story that I am going to tell revolves about the fact that I had just got back to Cape Cod in the winter, or the fall of 2000, or I mean 1981, so I was one of the new people at the station, even though I'd been there before. When deployments came up for the H-52 at the Cape at that time, they would have a lottery to see who went on the next one, and being as we were both newly assigned to Cape Cod, Lieutenant Commander Fred Pryor, a former Mobile instructor, and myself ended up being selected for this deployment. The deployment was to continue with the ... This was another part of the Haitian Migration Ops, I believe, and we were to be flown down to Naval Air Station at Guantanamo Naval Base in Cuba, and we would fly out of there, and we were assigned to be flying off the Coast Guard Cutter Westwind, which is kind of strange in itself, flying on an icebreaker in the Caribbean. But since all the icebreakers had flight decks, they were able to use this to fill in on these patrols.

So we ended up with two lieutenant commanders flying together on a deployment, which was not a problem, because Fred and I were good friends and had mutual respect for each other, although my OCS class was in January, and his Academy class was in the summer of the same year we were commissioned, so I was senior to him, which didn't mean much of anything other than I guess I was the aircraft commander by default on the missions, even though we took turns sitting in the right seat.

Anyway, we flew out of Guantanamo during the day on patrols, just out in the Caribbean below the Guantanamo Bay, and then at night, we would go down to the

beach and look at the iguanas or took a tour of a observation post with the Marines that guard the base from the Cubans, and everybody stared at each other across a mine field, apparently, but there was no hostilities. After we'd been there for a couple weeks, the Westwind decided that it was time that they could take us aboard, so we flew out and joined the Westwind just south of Guantanamo and started off more towards Haiti to start our mission of patrolling for small vessels with migrants.

The first evening, I believe, that was we were aboard, was quiet, and we went to bed, and halfway through the night, we could hear the engines revving up, and we knew that the ship was doing something. Shortly thereafter, one of the crewmen from the ship came down, knocked on the door, and told us that there was a collision of two freighters, one a small coastal freighter, and two a larger Russian freighter, that was up in the straits between the Bahamas and Cuba. And they had rescued ... The people on the Russian vessel had rescued the people on the smaller coastal freighter that they had sunk, that except for they were missing one person, so they were going to launch us as soon as they were close enough to feel about it, to put us on scene at first light to start a search for this missing crewman.

So we got up and launched off at first light and headed up through the straits to the location of the collision. The word we got from the master that was giving information from the vessel that had rescued him was that his vessel, the Antilles Sun, had been struck and sunk very quickly, and he had mustered his crew on the fantail of his vessel, which was now looking like the Titanic from the movie, with the stern up in the air, and made sure everyone had a life vest, but he didn't think that the missing crewmen had gotten one, and he just briefed his crew to hang onto the rail, and when your feet are wet, let go, and that's how they got off. The vessel went down, but it had containers onboard deck, and they were separated with big 8 or 12-inch square beams for stacking, and those beams were floating in the ocean where the wreck occurred.

So we got on scene, and there was really nothing to be seen other than these big pieces of timber floating around. Now Fred and I both were pretty proficient in making the Loran-C mini navigator that we had onboard the H-52s work in areas where the Loran-C didn't work real well. We could get them to sort of work and set up a decent search pattern using them. So we were set up a parallel track search and started in on this, the pattern, and then we lost coverage with the Loran, had to reinitiate it, so we started to search again, and we made the second pass. The

crewman in the back says, "I have something," and sure enough, there was someone clinging to one of these big beams, floating in the water with a life vest on.

So we didn't say, "Ah, he's got a life vest. It's not the one we're looking for," but we went over to pick him up. Well, while we were rigging up to do the hoist, and Fred was going to do the hoist because he was in the right seat, and I said, "Boy, I wish we had a camera," but I didn't say it out loud, unfortunately. So we moved in to do the hoist, and you picture this little ... He was a Filipino. All the crew were Filipinos on the Antilles Sun, and his hands were up in the position of someone praying, so he had looked like he was giving thanks for praying for his rescue before we picked him up.

Anyway, we did the pickup of the man, and then we flew him over and hoisted him down on the Russian vessel to get him so where he could be treated for hypothermia better than on the back of an H-52 going 60 miles back to the cutter Westwind. But when we got back to the Westwind, we'd secured the helicopter onboard, they took the Westwind up and transferred all the survivors from the Antilles Sun over onto the Westwind to transport them into port, and we got a ... Someone, the master, I believe, translated something that the crewman that we had rescued. It was he wrote a thank you to us, and between that letter and the interview that the captain told us that he did with him, the crewman apparently had been in the water and had prayed for his survival, and then towards the morning, he was so hypothermic, he was starting to pray that the sharks would get him, because apparently, being a good Catholic, he couldn't kill himself. But he said if the shark got him, then he'd be out of his misery.

So the poignant picture that I have in my mind that we could have captured on Fred's camera if he had remembered that he had had it on his helmet bag, that I believe would have been on the cover of Life, this young fellow looked like he was praying. I think what he was doing was saying, "Lord, please cancel that shark. I'm happy to be alive."

I continued operating out of the Air Station Cape Cod for another three years, and during which time, I had many significant rescues, but I also had a mission that is very historic but meaningless, I guess, to non-aviators and Coast Guard crewman that flew in HU-16. The HU-16 was an amphibious biplane that could land on land with its wheel or in the water. When I first started flying at Houston, it was about

the time that they'd outlawed water landings for the HU-16 because of concerns about corrosion and that they might not be able to take the stress much longer for doing the water landings. Anyhow, it served at the Cape until the early '80s, and we had the last operational one, the crew there had spent a lot of time fixing it up for display, and it was going to have an official last flight, and then be displayed, which it still is, at the Air Station Cape Cod as you come upon the facility itself off of Otis Air National Guard Base.

So our mission the day of the retirement was to fly to Boston and pick up Admiral Bowman, the district commander so that he could participate in the retirement ceremony. So I got up and because I think I had the duty the night before, so we got up early to fly up there to pick him up to bring him down. And when we got up, it was a typical what we called Cape Crud weather, foggy, low visibility, and otherwise, there was no storm that day, so but there was low visibility. So I filed an instrument flight plan up to Boston Logan Airport, flew up there, shut the ILS, and went in to pick up the admiral.

Unfortunately, just before we landed, the crewman said, "That darn torque meter filter bowl is dripping oil again, so we will have to get that fixed before we can go take in the Admiral." So I knew that he would need to drive, so after we landed, this was in the days before we had radio comms, but we waited landing and called the district and said, "The admiral will have to drive himself because we don't have an aircraft that can take him down. Ours is broken." And they said, "Well, it's okay, because he left an hour ago because he didn't think you'd be coming to get him." So the communications were real good between one side and the other.

But I went ahead and said, "Well, I wonder what we can do to fix this thing." So the crewman took the filter bowl loose and found that, by running his finger around the seat of the O-ring and having it come out with blood on it, found that there was a burr, which was causing it to eat these O-rings. Petty Officer Penber, one of our very good enginemen, and I took that O-ring over to the Pan American hangar, Pan Am was still flying in that time, and went to one of their supply clerks in the maintenance department and said, "Do you have an O-ring about this size?" and sure enough, they had one. Ours was a black rubber, his was a brown rubber, but the same size and diameter, cross-section.

So we took it back, put it in the filter bowl, and ran up the APU, which puts pressure on the oil system, or as well as the hydraulics, and we found that it was not leaking.

So we decided, "Well, we'll just head on back," taxied out, and called the tower and got a special VFR clearance to get out of the control zone, the Class B airspace. I don't know if it was Class B at the time, but it was a TCA, so we got out of there on a special VFR clearance. As we got near Cape Cod, we decided it was worse down there, we'd climb up and shoot the ILS to two three.

So we did so, and as we came into land, the tower said, "Can you land and hold short of runway three two that the HU-16 is going to do a flight, and we want to let it go ahead and do it." And we said, "No problem, but we'd like to taxi up an old short so we can watch," which we did. And we sat there, and of course, you can hear the HU-16 over the roar of the turbo jet engines on the ... Turbo shaft engines on the helicopter and the rotors turning. We hear the thing winding up, so we looked out, and the crewman were up looking through the cockpit window with us, and in the quarter-mile visibility or whatever, we saw the HU-16 go by about 18 inches above the runway before it set back down, and that was the final flight of the HU-16, and we were the only, the four of us were the only people that witnessed it from the ground.

One of the interesting flights I had during my first tour at Cape Cod involved an oil spill that started with an oil spill in Portland Main Harbor, and they wanted an H-52 to fly up and carry the strike team, the strike team being a team of people that go to clean up or restrict the spread of oil slicks during this type of disaster. They'd fly around in the back of a C-130 out of Elizabeth City with their equipment, and then they'd deploy it around to try to keep the oil retained so they can scoop it up with skimmers and such.

So we loaded up the two pilots and a crewman, the standard crew on an H-52, flew up to Portland Harbor, picked up the on-scene commander, and we were flying around and noticed that our oil pressure in the engine was not showing the right pressure, and a couple other weird things had started happening right after there was a big flash of an electrical arc from the back of the helicopter. So we said, "Well, I don't think it's an engine problem, but we're going to land quickly and shut it down to make sure we don't burn the engine up because we only got one." So we landed back and taxied in next to the C-130 and shut down, but as we brought the turns back below the 90% rotor RPM that would allow the generators to work, they came back on for a second and then slowly came back off as the RPM got lower and we put the rotor brake on.

So we knew we had an electrical problem. The crewman went in the back and found a burnt connection. There was a relay that ran the ground inverter, which gave us alternating current for a start to allow to read our alternating current gauges, and then in flight, the generators would take over, and it would disconnect the ground inverter. Well, something in that system had broken, but here we are sitting on the deck with a helicopter that's not fully functional, but there was a nor'easter coming. So I, in consulting with the air station engineers and ops, I said, "The best thing is to take this wounded duck up to Naval Air Station Brunswick," which was fairly close, less than an hour away, "Because we can get it in a hangar there when this nor'easter hits."

So we did that, flew up there, and all the way up there, I'm thinking, "What can we do to get this thing to work?" And I called back to the air station and said, "Well, I guess the easiest thing is be to hot wire it so that the ground inverter's running all the time," and they looked in the electrical diagrams and came back and said, "Well, the best thing would be to make it not work ever and start with an air AC alternating current generator or APU," we called the auxiliary power unit that's on the ground that you plug into the aircraft, because we could use either direct current or alternating current ground inverter, I mean, APUs.

So we said we'd do that, so the crewman made the connections necessary for that to happen. So we could fly out of military bases and have the air alternating current APUs. So we went to the motel, and the next day, we stayed in the motel as several feet of snow fell, and the whole coast got beat up with the high winds of this nor'easter. I believe it was nor'easter of '78, which you can Google if you're interested.

Anyhow, the next morning after that cleared, we had blue skies, and they plowed over there so we could drive back over to the naval air station, and we found out that we had the only helicopter that could be flown in the First Coast Guard District, because there was no power at the air station on Cape Cod, and there was six or eight foot of snow drifts up against the hangar doors, so they couldn't even get them pushed open to start plowing to get some helicopters out to do the mission. So it fell upon us to rescue the people on the manned lighthouses.

Now I think we got the people off of Goat Island, and the Isles of Shoals, I know we rescued everybody there, and White Island Light and Boon Island Light is a famous light off of the coast of Maine, New Hampshire border out, I don't know, 20 or more

miles at sea. It was, we used to do logistics flight for aides to navigation people, to take them out there to do maintenance on the foghorn, and the light, and the generators, but there was a manned light at the time, and when I was out there, we'd land and shut down on the helo pad. It had a nice helipad, and we'd land, and I would climb the tower just to look out, and I said, "Boy, if there was ever a storm, I'd get in this tower," because it was solid granite lighthouse, round, and the waves would break around that thing and not get you.

So when we got out to pick the people up there, we just picked them up and left, but later, when I went back to land, to help them make repairs on it, there was a big boulder in the passageway between the lighthouse building and the light tower itself. There was a big boulder in that passageway, and I had asked the crew from the lighthouse if they had gotten in the tower, and they said, "Yes, we got in the tower," because the upper floor of this two-story building that housed them was gone. There were three big oil tanks that they used to run the generators. Well, the one that was full was still in the cradle, the one that was partially full was askew in its cradle, and the third cradle was empty, and the tank was entirely gone. So that storm ... And the corner of the helo, concrete helipad had broken off, so the power of the sea is unbelievable, and that was a good example thereof.

So anyway, we did all the rescuing of the people needed and then took our helicopter home to get it fixed the right way, but that was very interesting to find that we had to hot wire a helicopter to do the mission after the blizzard of 1978. I don't know. These are just funny stories.

Speaker 2: Well, what else you got?

David F. Cooper: Well, the biggest rescue of my career, if you want that.

Speaker 2: Yeah.

David F. Cooper: It was I think in March of '84. I was standing duty, and when we stood duty, we would relieve the watch at 15:30, or 3:30 in the afternoon, so that supposedly, if you were conscientious, you'd sleep in a little bit, and you'd be well rested but start your watch, because you could be up all night flying. And I was pretty good about not abusing that, going to the beach all day and swimming or whatever, but we were over at the Cape Cod Mall, which was in Hyannis, halfway out the Cape from ... The Otis is at the west end, doesn't border on Buzzards Bay,

but it's within a few miles of the base itself. The airport is maybe five or eight miles from Buzzards Bay, and Hyannis is in the middle, and then Chatham is at the far east end, at the elbow of ... Everybody, if they want to assimilate Cape Cod, take your right arm and bend your elbow 90 degrees, and your hand bends around. That's where Provincetown is, so you have the entire Cape on your right arm.

So anyway, we were at the shopping center and watching the little shopping carts blow across the parking lot, and I said, "This might be an interesting night at the Cape." So went in, relieved the watch, knew there was a storm coming, and just went through normal routine, you know, obviously, checking weather and whatnot, checking the aircraft, briefing the crew, and then sort of kicking back. When we got a call that there was a small freighter, it's a good size, but it's you know, 400 or 500 feet, but it was ... We didn't know the size of the vessel at the time, and anyway, it lost power, did not have much ballast aboard, and it was empty. And it was up on the shoals off of the Cape, with a crew of 23, and they were going to need rescuing.

So we took the H-3, the duty H-3, our 22,000 pound max gross helicopter, and I said, "Well, tow it out on the ramp away from the hangar so that if we have a problem getting the thing up to speed," because we had a good 40 knots of wind and gusting, "that the parts won't damage anything else around." So the H-3 had some magic numbers in the limitations, and one of which was you could momentarily pull 150% torque on one engine into the gear box for a brief amount of time and not being over torquing the gear box and having to overhaul it, so I didn't even think of that. But we taxied the, took the helicopter out on the taxiway before we ran it up, so when started it, the blades, of course, are bouncing, like not quite hitting the taxiway, but a lot more than they normally would, the flex with the gusty winds. So when it comes time to engage, you take the slack out of the throttle so that it'd respond immediately, then you release the rotor brake and, more or less gently, accelerate it.

So I got a feel for the timing of the gust and said, "I'll bring the speed up on the engine and then release the brake when we get this brake," so I'm just about to release the brake, and we got an odd gust that was not in that period of the major gust with then steady state 40 knot winds, so I paused for a second. Well, the engine continued to creep up, so then when I did release the rotor brake, it sped up to full speed and used about probably 130% torque immediately, so I got a example of I guess why they had that limitation allowed for this type of engagement.

But anyway, that to me was technically one of the hardest things we did. We got that up to speed, we took off and headed towards ... It was Nauset Beach, which is a little bit north of Chatham, and we were told going out there that it was 130, but we thought it was 130 feet, but it turned out to be 130 meters, so it was a lot bigger vessel than we initially thought. And so I took the aircraft north from the air station into Cape Cod Bay, or over it, to cut down on the turbulence. If you're over land, the land itself causes more turbulence down low because of topography of the surface there, with the sand dunes and things. And then we went across the forearm of the Cape and went down to the scene, and apparently, it was rougher than I thought because their crew said that they were feeling a little airsick at the time, but I guess I was zoned in on getting us there.

So we get on scene, and the vessel had crossed the outer bar and was up just off the beach, with the waves breaking over the deck, and the crew were all back at the back of the vessel. The bridge was at the back of the vessel. It was one of those bulk carrier type vessels. So we tried to get the crew to get off, and we were trying to brief them, and they said, "Well, we can't get off until the owners say that we can abandon ship, and we're waiting for a phone call."

So we ended up climbing up to 500 feet to cut down on the turbulence, so the cloud decks were about 1,000, I guess, and sat in a hover, which normally, you wouldn't do, because you try to save fuel, but the torque it required to maintain our hover was less than the power, torque power, required to fly at the maximum endurance, maximum flight lift to drag ratio, v y, they call it, and we just sat there for about an hour till it got dark, and then they said they could get them off. So now we have to get these people off in the dark.

So we went down, and we hoisted them off the bridge two at a time, and we had eight aboard, and my crewman, Jeff Amatrudo said, "The trail line is tearing, and we need to get the other one," and I said, "Okay, well, we'll go over and land and drop these folks off while you're doing that." So we did, but then we also now landed over at a parking lot near ... This was near a regular beach that they used in the summer for people to swim. Went back, picked up 13 people, and then the captain and the first mate, we'd said we'd pick them off a different part of the bridge because they wouldn't have anybody to attend the trail line.

So we went over and dropped off the 13 people, and it was kind of amusing, and it was like looking at circus clowns getting out of a small car. These people just kept

getting off and getting off, and people would come up and escort them around the front of the helicopter and wrap them in blankets and then carry them off. So we did that, and then we went back and got the captain and the first mate, and then we went home, all through this same turbulence that we went out in.

So we got back to the hangar and put the helicopter to bed, and then we actually played some basketball in the hangar deck just to unwind, because I guess we all had adrenaline highs. So we get a call that, like four in the morning, of a missing fishing vessel off of Montauk, and so we ended up taking off at first light, went out, and we located an emergency transmitter that we picked up with a basket and confirmed it was off that vessel. It had the name of the vessel on it, so we searched around till we needed fuel and went home.

But that storm not only sank that vessel, it took the Great Point Light, which was a small granite light structure at the northeast tip of Nantucket, and demolished it. And I don't know if this was the storm, but so you used to have a half of one of the T2 tankers that had been on the beach off of Chatham for years that we used to go out and hoist off of for practice. It had disappeared in one of those storms, so that storm had the potential to take the motor vessel Eldia, which was the one we took the 23 people off, and had break it and caused it to roll over, and they lost all those people. So as it ended up, they dragged the thing off months later, towed it in, and then found out it had structural damage. But yeah, that was ... I think those people needed to be taken off, so we did it.

One of the most interesting flights we had, technically, it was not too difficult, but there was a solo sailor race that left somewhere from Europe, England, I think, and it was in route to Newport, Rhode Island, and the race, you had to be a solo sailor, and you had to use celestial navigation, because part of the race score had to do with your log of your positions compared to where you really were. We knew none of these. All we know was that we got a mayday call from a man said, "My boat's been hit by a whale. It's going to sink. I'm getting in my lifeboat or raft, and my position from DR," since he'd been under clouds for a couple of days, "Is such and such." And then that was the last ... You know, he said, "I think I'm between two lines of latitude," so he was like 60 miles, nautical miles ... He could be either side of that, so it was basically a 60-mile track space for a search.

So we got the helicopter loaded with gas and launched a fixed-wing aircraft. I believe then, it was a Falcon jet, and I'm pretty sure it was, because of the speed. So

they went out to the reported position, and when they got on scene, we launched, figuring that by the time we got there, we would be able to have a location of the life raft. The Canadians were flying in their big search plane. I think it's also an ASW plane like we use the P-3 Orions. They had this, I think it was an Argus, they called it.

So we were going to go the southern part of the longitude that he thought he was at and fly up from between one latitude and the other, just for something to do, but we were going to do it slow and save fuel. The Argus first was there, and then in the middle of this, they get a call that says, "Well, France says he's in this position," and we were going, "What do they know?" But the Argus and my H-3, we continued to search that track between the latitudes on the longitude he had given us, and we sent the Falcon to go check it out.

So we were about halfway up between the two latitudes when the Falcon called back and said, "We got a raft." So we went to the position that they said, and sure enough, there was a raft in the water. So we rigged up the basket to hoist the man. His name was Henk, H-E-N-K, but I guess it's like Hank. Henk van der Weg. He was Dutch. And we picked him up, and he got in the basket, but he lost a bag and his thing that looked like a flying saucer, it was circular, and it had a dome in the middle, like a bowler hat or whatnot. And as the crewman was lifting him, he said, "He dropped something. He wants to get it. He's pointing at it."

So at this point in the evolution, I could see the things out my window. I couldn't see the basket, but I could see what he wanted, so I said, "Okay, put him down and get it," and I kind of moved the helicopter in a banana-shaped way that they were positioned out in front of him, and he was able to scoop them up, and we didn't spend any time doing that. Picked them up and brought them up into the helicopter, and by this point, we didn't have enough gas to get back to Cape Cod, so we took him to Halifax and bought him lunch and then flew him back to Cape Cod, and they got a picture of him holding this ... The bowler hat white thing turned out to be a Loran-operated navigation device that would pinpoint his location throughout the race, so it was a safety thing as well as a benchmark for his navigation so that when he got done, they could see where he was compared to where he was, and I guess that counted certain points to that in his speed to see who won the race.

But we brought him back, and then the crewman of the Falcon jet was going to be going down towards Newport anyway and gave him a ride over to Newport, and my copilot, Jeff Garden, got his name and address and ended up going over and visiting him in his hometown. He said he went over, went to some bar, and said, "I'm looking for Henk van der Weg," and they said, "Well, normally, he drinks at this other bar," and that's how he said he met up with him.

So all right. And then the third most unusual case involved a house call at sea. Now we had a call that we needed to get a sailor that had a medical problem in that he hadn't been able to urinate for several days, and he was doing ... It wasn't, I don't believe, a race, but he was sailing from the Bahamas up to Newport and ran into this difficulty, and he was in a boat that he apparently had built himself, a big wooden sailboat. So we said, "Well, all right, we'll go out and take the doctor out and let him look at him."

So when he got within 300 miles of Nantucket, we filled a helicopter full of gas, picked up our ... He turned out to be our ... He was our pediatrician, but the flight surgeon was on leave, so he said he'd go, and so we said, "Okay." So we took him and headed out, and we knew where, basically, where the vessel was, because he had Loran, and so we just went right to his position.

So when we got on scene, we told Dr. Rockmore that he could have ... We said, "We can probably give you 15 minutes, and otherwise, hope you enjoy sailing because you'll be going in with him." So he said, "Sure, we'll ... Yeah, put me down." So had a little difficulty positioning the vessel. I liked to get the vessel in the correct position for the clear area for hoisting, which is normally a stern on the sailboat, being positioned so that it's facing the helicopter, and the bow is facing away from the side of the helicopter, so you're working out the right side of your helicopter with the vessel 90 degrees to you.

So I blew it around that way with the rotor wash and backed off, and it immediately snapped back the other way, and I said, "Could you put your rudder over the other side?" and he said, "Sure," and he did, and then it snapped itself back to the way I wanted it, so that solved that problem. But we put him down the horse collar, and we said, "Well, okay, we're going to fly ..." I told him that we were going to fly around in circles to save fuel until he had done what he needed to do, and we were halfway around the first orbit, and he said, "Okay, I'm done." So we go back, pick him, and then head home, and he said, "Yeah," he got there, and he said he tubed

his equipment and tapped the bladder, and he said they filled the bag that's attached to the device immediately. And so he told the guy, "When I've gone, cut the corner off the bag, empty it, but leave the tube in, and just empty it as you need until you get into port," which he did, and they found out later, or when he got there, that he had a congenital defect all his life, and it finally manifested itself, and that's why he had that emergency.

And someone asked me, you know, in an interview when we were talking about this case, "Well, why didn't you just pick him up? Why'd you take the doctor to him?" And I said, "Well, when I saw the sturdiness of the vessel that he had built," I said, "You leave that out, and some fishing boat hits it at night, the fishing boat is going to probably sink." So it was a, I said, just to present a hazard to navigation. But it's not often you take a doctor 300 at sea for a house call.

So it just shows the variety of things that you can use that hoist cable for. I've prologued to that story. Unfortunately, Dr. Rockmore was killed in an H-3 accident in Kodiak after he had become a flight surgeon, you know, accident that I lost a couple of good friends on, so ...

In my career, I probably had as many good friends lost to mother nature as a lot of Army friends that came in the Coast Guard had buddies lost in combat, because it's the power of the ocean, the power of the wind is something that there's nothing can make that cannot take out, and it's going to get worse as we get climate change increases the severity of the storms.

The Coast Guard used to have lightships. They had a Buzzards Bay Light, an Ambrose Light, and these vessels would go out, put the mushroom anchor down, and just anchor there, and I think we lost a couple because freighters would home in on their homing device and occasionally home in too close and do them in. So they ended up replacing them with towers. They put lights on stilts, so they had them, and they were supposed to be able to go out and tie boats up underneath and resupply them that way, but it ended up that they deteriorated too fast or whatnot, and so they weren't that useful.

So we always ended up using the small helicopters to take crew out, or breakfast or whatever, and deliver supplies. So we one that, in Buzzards Bay, Buzzards Bay Tower, sits at the southern end of Buzzards Bay, which sits between Cape Cod and New Bedford, and north of Martha's Vineyard. So we had a new crewman or a new

pilot, rather, assigned to the station, so I said, "Well, we'll go out and do the logistics flight," because they needed to take a crewman out to work on the light itself, I think. Anyway, some technical thing. So we flew out, dropped him off, and then I said, "Well, I will go show you, while we're just killing time, where Jungle Beach is."

And Jungle Beach was the name of the beach on the south side of Martha's Vineyard that people would sunbathe without having anything interfering with their tan line. Well, this was in March, and nobody was going to be there, but it's also a very interesting ... You know, it's like the cliffs, like the White Cliffs of Dover, only they're not white.

So we flew over. Unbeknownst to us, there was an H-3 that was also flying in a same kind of general area, went by the west coast of Martha's Vineyard, and went on. Well, then we come by, and we find there's a boat in the surf just off the west side of Martha's Vineyard, in an area that has some rocks mixed in with the sand.

Anyway, it was a man and his son, and the man was kind of like in the boat trying to keep it off the rocks, so he was sometimes in the water, trying to push it off the rocks and whatnot. So we see him, and I said, "Well, this is not going to end good if the man fails, and then the boat goes on the rocks, and the kid ends up in the water." So I said, "We need to do something," and I said, "Obviously, he's trying to save his boat, so we'll tow his boat off with the H-52."

Now the H-52 supposedly had something called a Tugbird that you could tow with, but we were not allowed to tow anything with a secured line to the vessel, and we didn't ever use that system, but we were allowed to tow the boat using a handheld line. A crewman would sit in the door and hold a rope. So we went around, dropped a line to the guy and told him, and we kind of indicated what we were going to do. So he got ready to go, and we're starting to move, and the crewman's on what we call hot mic. He flips his mic on steady, and that way, he doesn't have to hold a mic button, and then he just talks and tells you what to do.

So I could hear him, and he'd go, "Forward, easy. Forward. Forward, easy!" Then his voice would change, and I'd know he's under strain, and he said, "I had to let the line go." So I said, "Okay," and I said, "Go around." So I think we hoisted up the line again, and so ok alright, we'll try it again," and I said, since the pilot was new to the aircraft, I said, "I'll do it." So I did it from the left seat, and just, I'd listen to the crewman, and his voice got a little in octave, I would ease up on the strain that we

were putting on the towboat line, and we were able to tow him out past the surf line, and he was able to anchor there. And we had, long before, as soon as we saw this, called the small boat station to get a boat underway. So the boat came around from the station on Martha's Vineyard and took him in tow.

So anyway, we just went on, did our thing, went back, picked up our logistics man from Buzzards Bay Light, took him back, then didn't think anything of it. Well, the man was so grateful, he wrote the commandant and thanked him, and then so the commandant sent a letter to the CO of Cape Cod, you know, saying ... And so I think I have a copy of the letter somewhere that we got credit for rescuing this guy. And he saw the H-3 go by, and then we came, and he thought we had seen him and circled around, but it was actually a second helicopter, but we rescued the man, probably saved his son, at least, and all because we were just showing where you go when you're transitioning around Martha's Vineyard for some sights that might please your eyes.

I've flown with a lot of really good pilots. I learned a lot from those that were there before I was, and I tried to pass what I learned from them on to some junior pilots. And I spent most of ... I guess, two-thirds of my career as an instructor pilot in the H-52, and then as an instructor pilot in the H-3. And so there was several individuals that were well above the norm, one of which became the Coast Guard's first astronaut, and one of them became a Harmon Trophy winner and a Vice Commandant of the Coast Guard.

So Bruce Melnick was our astronaut, and when he came to Cape Cod, and he was going through his aircraft commander check ride, you know, after he'd gotten all the training, and we had to do a night boat check ride ... Well, it was in the summer, so I always would, since it was fairly dark, if you waited till it got completely dark before you started the mission, got back late, and the crewmen had to clean up the helicopter after midnight, which I didn't like to see happen, so I would ... It was standard procedure, just I would have them put their dark visor and fly the first part of the mission till it got really dark with the dark visor down, which almost made it like night.

And so he came in all primed to go out and do a couple hoists, couple platform pickups and be all done with his program. So the first thing he did when he walked in was I said, "Okay, the weather is a hundred and a quarter, and we've got to do this mission out at Nantucket, so plan and file, and we'll fly out there and do it." So

he said, he told me, he said it just totally blew his mind, because he was all set to do one thing, and now he's going to do an instrument to do his hoist check. But that's the kind of thing that I knew he could do, and he did, and we flew out there in our simulated instrument approach, shot the approach, went out off shore, did the boat hoists and the platform pickups, and went home. But it was just that certain people you know that can handle it, then you'd make them do it a little harder.

There was another pilot that came up to me in one of the reunions and said, "I remember you. You were hard." And I said, "I was a Santa Claus." "No, you were hard." He said, "I went out on my check ride, and then thought that we done when we backed off the boat, and then you said, 'Okay, do it again with your AFCS off,'" or Ace off. I guess it was a 52. And he said it blew his mind, but I said, "Hey, I wouldn't have asked you to do it if you couldn't do it." And so that was some of the funny things.

But Bruce Melnick and I, we were assigned to a ship when we were enforcing the 200-mile economic zone, so we were out with the helicopter on the ship in the '70s, I think, like '78 or '79. We were trying to coordinate ... The ship wanted to board vessels just after they had hauled back their nets and put a fish agent onboard to see what they're doing, and then they also had some that they wanted by name, because they hadn't boarded them for a while.

So we went and looked at one vessel, and they said, "Okay, but we need you to go find this other one for us." So we went over to find them, and by the time we got back, the haul back had been completed, and we noticed in the wake of the vessel, they don't move very fast when you're fishing, but enough to make a wake so you know where they've been, there was this swordfish, and it was swimming slowly upside down, so we knew it was not long for this world. So we decided, "All right, we'll let the vessel know and find out what they want us to do." Hint, hint. So we called the cutter up and said, "You know, you got swordfish I think's going to die." So they go, "Well, why don't you bring it back onboard for biological examination," and we said, "That sounds like a good idea."

So this was in the, what I considered the golden age of Coast Guard helicopter flying, the time when we had turbine helicopters that landed in the water. So we had the best of everything, the quick start capability of a turbine, the water landing capability of an amphibian, and a sturdy military grade helicopter. So we landed our helicopter in the water, and a crewman took a trail line and put some of it through

the mouth to secure it to the side of the helicopter, and a couple around the tail, and hooked it to the hoist hook. So he went back to the ship with the thing secured to the hoist hook and hoisted it down to the flight deck from the helicopter. And so we provided a nice swordfish dinner for the crew with a Sikorsky HH-52 as a fishing lure.

In closing, I'd like to say that Coast Guard Aviation is a circle of life where you're born into it, you go to flight training, and then you go into the Coast Guard portion at your duty station or whatever, and you learn from all the other pilots that have gone before, and if they're good, they'll tell you a little bit about some of the things they don't want to tell anybody so that you don't make the same mistakes. And then, but they also show you techniques to do things. I always liked to show people how to use your rotor wash and position the boat, if you need to, the way you want. It makes it a lot easier if you get it in the right position. And then so you pass that on, and that just continues in that circle.

But the thing that you really like about the Coast Guard is your crewmen, the guys that fix your helicopter and operate the hoist. They are, number one, you never fear going in a helicopter thinking that it might not be as well maintained as you would prefer, and that's the philosophy of the Coast Guard is the maintainers also fly as crewmen, so that's a little self-motivation that some of the other services don't use. And you get to know the guys, and you look out for them if you want. Now there's a thing in the military, tradition of not fraternizing with the enlisted people, but you get a little more fraternization in the aviation because the crews are small, but you're the point of the spear, and you're all going the same place, wherever that machine goes. And so you look out for the guys.

We had a deployment where we went into Roosevelt Roads in Puerto Rico, and we get there, and we were going to spend the night off the ship. And so we went to our rooms, they went to where they were going to have a room. Well, they came back and told us that, "Hey, they got us in this squad bay with no air conditioning," and I said, "Okay, well, we have mattresses, and we have box springs. So you take the mattresses and put them on the floor, and we'll all sleep in this room." So you try to look out for the guys, and they appreciate when you do stuff like that for them.