

# ST. PETERSBURG HALL BOAT SEAPLANE LOST

## HUGE SEAPLANE LOST IN 1,004 FEET OF WATER WING TIP PONTOON ONLY CLUE FOUND

By

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Demonstrating the quiet courage expected in a service which teaches its members that they "must go out but don't have to come back," six Coast Guard airmen, led by Lt. C. F. Edge, commander of the St. Petersburg air station, arrived back in St. Petersburg early yesterday morning after a harrowing experience far out on the gulf Friday when they abandoned a huge Hall Flying boat a few seconds before it capsized and later sank in 1,044 Feet of water.

The accident occurred 160 miles west of here after the crew had removed J. E. Flanik, 32—year old radio operator from the freighter *Commercial Bostonian*. He had suffered an attack of appendicitis.

"We had hoisted Flanik aboard our flying boat and I was about to start the motors and take off for Tampa when a sudden swell tore off the left wing tip pontoon and damaged a spar," Lt. Edge related.

### Second Wave Smashes Wing

"Immediately, the ship started to list and I placed two men out on the end of the right wing in an attempt to hold the ship on even keel. I felt that I could handle the plane and get to Tampa with the patient if I was successful in getting out of the water.

"While I was starting the motors, another big wave tore off the lower left wing and I could see plainly that it was going to be impossible to hold the plane. I had hoped to hold her steady and await arrival of Coast Guard assistance from St. Petersburg.

"When I realized that I was up against an impossibility, I ordered the crew to inflate a rubber life boat which we carried aboard and placed the patient in it. They put a life preserver on the man and succeeded in getting him moved. Two members of the crew, Leonard Stonerock and chief aviation Machinist's Mate R. T. Cupples, also boarded the rubber craft and paddled a safe distance from the plane.

"Then another big wave struck the plane and I was certain she would capsize," Lt. Edge continued. "I still stuck at the controls and ordered Aviation Pilot Ted MacWilliams, Pharmacist's Mate Louis Lyons and Radioman Avery Brace to jump overboard.

"I could feel the plane slowly turning over -- so I was the last men to go. I guess I got fouled with something when I jumped out," Lt. Edge said as he rubbed painful injuries which he suffered on both legs.

"I jumped into the water through the overhead hatch and in a quarter of a minute the big plane turned turtle and rolled over on her back."

### **Swims to Life Boat**

"Then I swam toward a wooden life boat which was approaching from the freighter and we took MacWilliams, Brace and Lyons off their perch on the hull of the overturned plane."

After being taken aboard the freighter, the men arrived at Port Tampa at 4 o'clock yesterday morning. The stricken radioman immediately was taken to Tampa municipal hospital and the flyers returned here in an automobile.

Almost immediately Lt. Edge, piloting a Grumman amphibian, and MacWilliams at the controls of a Douglas amphibian, took off from the air station to assist the Coast Guard Cutter *Nemesis* in trying to locate the wrecked plane. The *Nemesis* had planned to tow the ship back to St. Petersburg.

"We combed the territory for a number of hours but failed to sight the plane," Lt. Edge said. "The water was pretty rough and there were a lot of whitecaps which would make it difficult to sight the plane. However, I thought I saw oil on the water not far from the location where we abandoned ship. I feel confident she sank there."

### **Planes Resume Search**

The planes returned from the search and early yesterday afternoon the hunt was again resumed when planes piloted by MacWilliams and Aviation Machinist's Mate Loren Perry combed the Gulf. MacWilliams at 4:15 reported sighting "what appeared to be a wing tip pontoon."

Early last night Flank was reported in "Fair" condition at the Tampa hospital. He had not undergone an operation, it was learned.

The Hall Flying boat, largest plane ever made for the Coast Guard, was one of seven manufactured recently for the government and had been in service here for about six months. It weighed eight tons and had a 2,000-mile cruising range. It was valued at approximately \$100,000.

The *Commercial Bostonian* of the Moremack line was in charge of Capt. J. C. Bach and was sailing from Houston, Texas to Tampa when Flanik was stricken.

### **Tribute to Guardsman**

At the hospital last night, Flanik praised the conduct of Pharmacist's Mate Lyons who sat up with him during the night as the freighter proceeded to Tampa.

"He kept icebags on my abdomen all night and I guess I'd have died if it hadn't been for him," Flanik said.

During the late afternoon an object which MacWilliams sighted on the water was taken aboard the *Nemesis* where it was identified as the left pontoon from the ill-fated plane. Although Lt. Comdr. T. Y. Awalt expressed belief in a radio message that the plane had sunk, his cutter continued the search and will be joined early today by the Coast Guard Cutter *Mojave* from Miami.