



Long Legs of PAVE LOW Save 2 Sailors Hurt in Snarling Atlantic

Two U.S. Air Force PAVE LOW IV helicopter crews braved long distances in blustery Atlantic weather May 22 to rescue an injured man and woman from a storm-battered yacht about 500 miles southwest of Land' s End, England.

The air-refuelable HH-53M special operations aircraft were summoned from their base at RAF Mildenhall after it became clear that the 65-foot sailing yacht Persuader was beyond the range of British rescue helicopters.

One sailor who was plucked from the yacht in a Force 10 storm told The Daily Telegraph how he thought he was going to die when a 60-foot wave swept him overboard.

Simon Briscoe, 24, was on watch when the gigantic wave struck. He was thrown from the boat and struggled back on boat with his safety harness. Below deck, Anya Banks, 27, the ship's cook, had been knocked unconscious.

Both were hoisted aboard the Sikorsky heavy-lift helicopters.

After activating their emergency radio beacon, the seven-strong crew cut the mast and rigging free from the boat and engaged their engines to ride out the storm.



Ability of PAVE LOW to refuel in midair can make the SAR difference.

U.S. Air Force photo

A request for urgent assistance was flashed to the USAF Special Operations Group based at RAF Mildenhall. Two MH-53M PAVE LOW IV helicopters, which have the unique capability of air-to-air refueling, were offered for the 1,300-mile mission.

The helicopters departed with a pair of C-130 Hercules tanker aircraft in company. After seven-and-a-half hours of continuous flying and multiple refuelings, the big helicopters reached Persuader.

"The first we saw of them was two helicopters at daybreak coming over the horizon, with both attached to a Hercules, refueling. An amazing and welcome sight," survivor Briscoe told the newspaper.

With the westerly winds still gusting at more than 50 mph, the rescuers managed to land an aircrewman on the decks of Persuader as it pitched and tossed in the 24-foot swell.

While a container ship tried to shelter the Persuader from the breaking waves, the helicopters began their rescue, which involved hovering for two hours.

"Our paramedic was lowered and treated the first casualty, who was put on a litter and passed back up to the aircraft. The other casualty and the paramedic were then retrieved," said USAF Master Sgt. Chuck Roberts.

The other five members of the Persuader's crew remained on board to limp the charter yacht into Falmouth.