

VP-40

Cooperation for Survival

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Most emergencies can be managed and training is the key to success. Patrol Squadron 40 under Commander D. S. Axtman, based at NAS Moffett Field, teamed up with a neighboring squadron from another service recently to provide both units with rescue and survival training that may someday save lives.

The exercise simulated conditions which might actually be encountered in an aircraft ditching situation in the open ocean. Although the planning for this event had been taking place for several weeks prior, neither the crew of the P-3C or of the HH-3 rescue helicopter involved was aware that a staged ditching was about to occur.

It was not until combat aircrew nine arrived at the briefing room for a routine patrol flight that they learned some of them would be placed in a survival situation in the Pacific Ocean that day rather than conducting surveillance. Early in the preflight, individual crew members were selected to be survivors of the staged aircraft ditching. The crewmen were then driven to Santa Cruz harbor to meet the safety boat team from the Air Guard rescue and recovery squadron. They were allowed to use only survival equipment that would be available in any ditching from a P-3C.

After notifying the Coast Guard and local rescue authorities, the aircrewmembers were placed in the ocean about three miles southwest of Santa Cruz Beach. They were outfitted in new bright orange survival suits, recently authorized for use by flight personnel. While awaiting rescue, the survivors practiced attracting potential rescuers



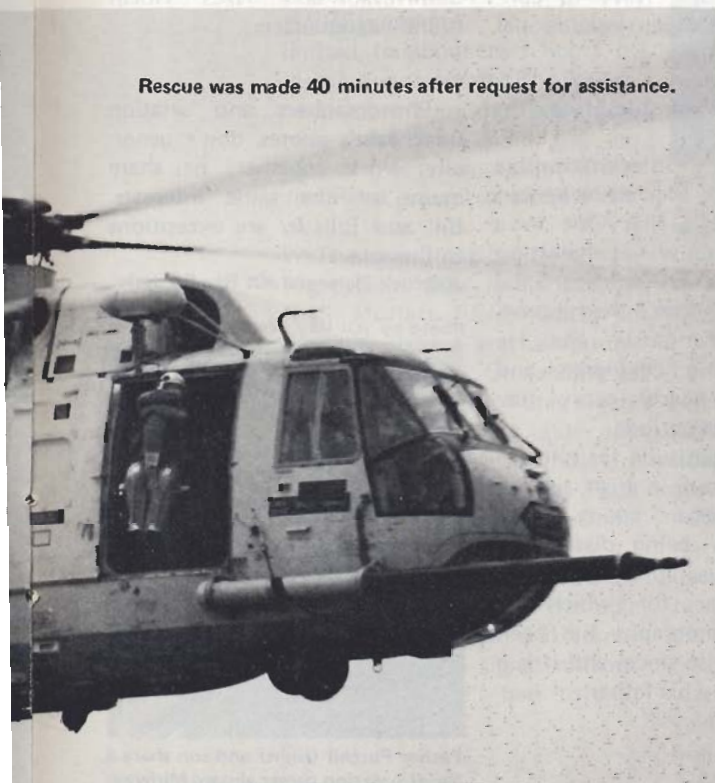


P-3C of VP-40 off the coast of California.

with flares, smoke markers, sea dye and other survival equipment provided in the life raft. The five survivors remained afloat for over four hours in a water temperature of 59 degrees. The survival suit successfully kept the aircrewmembers warm and dry while in the life raft. In the event of a real emergency, familiarity with the use of these survival devices would be essential and "hands on" training of this type would prove invaluable. To add to the realism and to get the most benefit from the training, the squadron carried out all established procedures as if the event were a real accident. The aircraft pre-mishap plan for search and rescue efforts was carried out in simulation by key Patrol Squadron 40 personnel. In addition, key members of the 129th Rescue Squadron, commanded by Colonel E. R. Aguilar, were notified and an HH-3 rescue helicopter was dispatched to search for the surviving airmen.

Forty minutes after the request for assistance was received by the Air Guard, the helicopter successfully located the survivors' life raft and was preparing to retrieve them from the ocean. As the helicopter hovered some 50 feet above the first man to be rescued, an on-board crewman lowered a rescue cable and seat with a winch which the survivors quickly mounted for hoisting into the helicopter.

The exercise was a complete success. The VP-40 aircrew received survival training that is impossible to realize from books or lectures; Air National Guard members acquired invaluable experience in search and rescue operations; and the two neighboring units from NAS Moffett Field gained new insight into the advantages of cooperation.



Rescue was made 40 minutes after request for assistance.



VP-40 crewmen had no advance warning of the survival exercise.

