

## **The HH-52A**

### **A Recognition of those who flew it**

On January 9, 1963 the U.S. Coast Guard received the first of 99 Sikorsky S-62's which were given the designation HH-52A and the name "Seaguard", a name which never caught on amongst those who flew it..



The HH-52A was the Coast Guard's first turbine-powered helicopter. It had a rotor diameter of 53 feet, a range of 474 miles and a top speed of 109 mph. It was an extremely flexible rescue aircraft that could fully perform missions with a minimum crew. It was well suited for night and all-weather flight. The HH-52 had a hydraulic hoist and carried a rescue basket. The cabin could accommodate up to ten passengers or six litters. It was fully amphibious and was equipped with a removable foldout rescue platform that looked like a large extended step. It was a rectangular grid that sloped slightly downward beneath the water's surface when the helicopter was afloat. Incapacitated survivors could be scooped or dragged onto it greatly facilitating their rescue.

The HH-52, with over 15,000 lives saved in its twenty-six years of service, has the honor of having rescued more people than any other helicopter in the world. This little helicopter, a unique assemblage of proven parts, comfortably behind the cutting edge, performed astounding feats in thousands upon thousands of occasions. It became the international icon for rescue and proved the worth of the helicopter many times over. It had an enormous impact on Coast Guard Aviation.

The HH-52A, tail number 1426 was dedicated at the National Air and Space Museum's Udvar-Hazy Center on April 14, 2016. Much has been written about it. As my contribution I would like to present a few noteworthy achievements of those that flew these magnificent aircraft.

27 January 1967:

Lieutenant Bob Workman was the pilot of a Coast Guard HH-52A helicopter engaged in the perilous rescue of four adults and two children from the vessel Cecil Anne which was sinking 120 miles northeast of St. Petersburg, Florida. Workman proceeded without fixed wing escort and made a night instrument "Beep to Hover" maneuver while hampered by darkness and obstructions from a 24 foot antenna and a 12 foot jack staff. Despite the vessel yawing as much as 60 degrees and the stern submerged, he skillfully maneuvered the helicopter crosswind to hoist the six persons, one with a broken leg, from the bow of the boat. Due to the total weight on board the last hoist required 100% power plus translational lift from his forward motion to remain airborne.

12 March 1968:

Commander James Doughty was engaged in the evacuation of nine crewmen from the floating oil rig JULIE ANN, Dixilyn No. 8, located 110 miles southwest of New Orleans, Louisiana, in the Gulf of Mexico. Despite severe weather conditions with 40-knot winds, 20-foot seas and blowing spray he skillfully maneuvered the helicopter and hovered close aboard the sinking rig with his rotor blades less than 10-feet from the superstructure. Although occasional monstrous swells racked the rig, Doughty, with utmost precision successfully hoisted five survivors, off-loaded them on a nearby stationary oil rig platform and returned to the pounding rig to pick up the last four men under the same arduous conditions. With the stationary rig already crowded and his fuel state approaching a minimum, he proceeded directly to shore with the last survivors.

12 November 1968:

Lieutenant Commander Billy Murphy as pilot of a Coast Guard HH-52A helicopter engaged in the evacuation of nine crewmen from the foundering trawler NAPEAQUE, located two miles southeast of Hatteras Inlet, North Carolina. Despite 40 to 50 knot winds, 25-foot seas and blowing sea spray which hampered visibility; he skillfully maneuvered the helicopter into position for hoisting and hovered over the stern of the sinking vessel. Flying backwards and simultaneously changing heading to maintain his relative position over the ship which was rolling and pitching violently with her wildly gyrating mast topped by a whip antenna reaching a height of 40 feet, Murphy had but five seconds on each hoist to get the basket in position as the ship drifted downwind and wallowed in the trough. Operating under the same hazardous conditions for each subsequent hoist, further complicated by the crew of the NAPEAQUE as

they crowded into the rescue basket each time it came aboard, he quickly moved the helicopter in and out of position over the ship until nine men were removed from peril.

21 December 1968:

Lieutenant Commander George Garbe as pilot of a Coast Guard HH-52A helicopter engaged in the rescue of four men and a 10-year-old boy from the fishing vessel SEA ERMINE which had gone aground and was breaking up in heavy surf off Marmot Island, Alaska. Unable to climb above 700 feet because of a low freezing level, he proceeded in darkness, encountering heavy snow showers and fog enroute to the scene. The vessel was sighted approximately six and one-half miles from her reported position, aground and listing 30 degrees to starboard in the water below a sheer vertical cliff. Unable to distinguish a horizon, the surface or the shore, he executed a beep to a hover, turned off the aircraft search and hover lights to eliminate the reflection from sea spray and snow and landed in the water about one mile from the distressed vessel. Garbe then turned on the searchlight, sailed the helicopter towards the vessel until the rocks were visible in the beam of light, located the shore line, and lifted into a hover to air taxi over the ship. Despite the heavy surf, he positioned the helicopter over the stern of the vessel while simultaneously maintaining clearance from the surrounding terrain and the vessels rigging while a survivor was put in the basket. The aircraft was moved away from the wreck and the 10-year-old boy was then hoisted to safety. Garbe executed this exacting task four additional times to complete the rescue of the survivors.

19 January 1969:

Lieutenant Commander Robert Morhard was the pilot of a Coast Guard HH-52A helicopter engaged in the rescue of three stranded hikers who were clinging to a near vertical -razor-back edge of the Pali Cliffs on the island of Oahu, Hawaii. Upon arrival two men were observed perched on the roots of a small tree and a third straddling a rock 50 feet below. Despite winds gusting to 20 knots and with less than 10 feet rotor clearance from the face of the 80° cliff, Morhard maneuvered the helicopter into position and maintained an extremely difficult hover over the tree while a rescue basket was threaded aft of the helicopter and down through the branches of the tree to hoist the first man to safety. He off-loaded the first hiker to Pali Lookout and returned to the scene. Operating under the same hazardous conditions, Morhard skillfully positioned the helicopter and hovered over the tree permitting a guideline to be lowered to assist in threading the rescue basket through the branches while the second man was hoisted to safety. Displaying utmost precision during the third arduous operation, Morhard held the helicopter nearly stationary despite the buffeting winds, while a 50-foot guideline was lowered and the rescue basket placed directly in front of the survivor who then released his hold on the rock, grabbed and entered the basket.

29 August 1969:

As pilot of Coast Guard HH-52 helicopter Lieutenant Alan Dahms engaged in the evacuation of a severely injured survivor of an aircraft crash in the mountains of Southeast Alaska. The hoist area was only slightly larger than the rotor diameter. Dahms skillfully positioned the helicopter into a hover at treetop level. While maintaining this difficult position, the rescue cable was lowered its full length but remained 60 feet above the survivor. With precise airmanship, he maneuvered the helicopter down among the towering trees, simultaneously moving the tail to avoid outstretched branches which were dangerously close to the rotors. He maintained a stable hover while his crewman successfully hoisted the survivor aboard. Dahms then worked his way

above the trees and proceeded through adverse weather conditions of 200 feet overcast, one quarter mile visibility, in rain and fog to deliver the survivor to medical aid.

22 December 1971;

Lieutenant Commander Donald Addison, pilot of Coast Guard HH-52A 1388 helicopter engaged in the perilous rescue of seven crewmen from the burning tugboat PALMER GAILORD, located 23 miles southeast of Cape Hatteras, North Carolina. With approaching darkness and winds gusting to 45 knots, Addison proceeded to the scene and located the distressed burning vessel which was loaded with 40,000 gallons of fuel. Realizing the imminent danger, he quickly maneuvered the helicopter and hovered on instruments over the severe rolling and pitching deck of the vessel in 18-foot seas. With only the directions from his hoist operator, he skillfully moved the helicopter in and out of position over the tug until the seven men were removed from peril.

15 April 1976:

Lieutenant Commander John Lewis as pilot of Coast Guard HH-52A 1444 helicopter engaged in the perilous rescue of the captain of the ocean drilling rig OCEAN EXPRESS, which was sinking 40 miles east of Port Aransas, Texas. Dispatched from Air Station Corpus Christi, the aircraft proceeded to the scene in darkness, gale force winds, turbulence and reduced visibility. Upon arrival, the rig was observed to be listing heavily and battered by the mountainous seas. Quickly analyzing the situation, Lewis elected to attempt a rescue and, despite the conditions, skillfully maneuvered the aircraft into a position over the pitching vessel. However, because of a complete lack of visual reference, turbulence, heavy sea spray obscuring vision from the cockpit and unlighted rig legs extending 100 feet above the hovering helicopter, the first attempt nearly ended in disaster. With the arrival of a second Coast Guard aircraft to provide illumination, Lewis made a second rescue attempt and successfully positioned his aircraft so that the victim could jump into the rescue basket. While maneuvering the aircraft away from the rig and hoisting the survivor to the helicopter, the rig capsized and sank.

2 September 1977:

Lieutenant Richard Hauschildt as pilot of Coast Guard HH-52A 1370 helicopter engaged in the perilous rescue of two workers who had become trapped inside a 650-foot smokestack, 250 feet from the top, at a power plant in Portage, Wisconsin. Dispatched from Air Station Chicago, he piloted the aircraft to the scene despite darkness, low ceilings and marginal visibility. Upon arrival, Hauschildt conferred with the supervisory personnel at the plant and decided to utilize a steel cage to hoist the two men to safety. To accomplish this, he conducted two flights to the catwalk just below the top of the smokestack to deliver the cage, 250 feet of cable and two workers. The workers connected the cable to the cage and lowered it into the stack where one of the men entered it. Then, Hauschildt hovered the helicopter over the stack and when the hoist hook was attached to the cable, he began a slow vertical ascent, despite 20 to 30-knot winds, to raise the man in the protective cage out of the stack. After climbing only 30 feet, he lost sight of the stack and relied on lights 700 feet below him for visual reference points, and as the cage cleared the top of the stack, the helicopter entered the clouds. With assistance from the ground, Hauschildt maneuvered the aircraft to an open area and slowly lowered the cage to safety. He hoisted the second man from the stack in the same manner.

These are but a few. They relate a variety of missions and outstanding skill levels. In each of these cases there was a Distinguished Flying Cross awarded. The DFC is the highest aviation award given for non-combat flight operations.

This narrative is written as a tribute to all the kindred spirits and yet in a most humble sense – it is my personal expression of respect. I too have known the fist of fear in my stomach, a mouth so dry it was hard to talk and the elation that comes with the knowledge that I have just saved a person’s life. I have the privilege of knowing others who have done this and much more. I seek them out. Among the risk takers a bonding exists that is difficult to understand unless you have been there. It transcends. People take precedence over institution for it is the people who make the heritage of Coast Guard Aviation.

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