



# AFRAS Newsletter

Association for Rescue at Sea, Inc.

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Autumn 2009

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## Letter from the President

Dear Members and Friends of AFRAS,

Elsewhere in this issue you'll read about the outstanding heroes who were the recipients of our Gold, Silver and Amver awards during our annual Awards Ceremony on Capitol Hill so I won't go into details here, other than to say that their stories are indeed exciting and inspiring. As our Chairman, Vice Admiral Terry Cross, USCG (Ret) mentioned during his remarks, we had an exceptional group of candidates for each award, and it made the selection extremely hard. That said, I'd like to take a moment to sincerely thank the folks in the U.S. Coast Guard and the U.S. Coast Guard Auxiliary who took the time to submit nominations for the awards. This program would not be possible without your interest and support to recognize the outstanding accomplishments of your shipmates.

I would also like to thank Congressman Coble (Captain, USCGR Ret), who was our host again this year for providing us the opportunity to have such a wonderful venue as the Rayburn House Office Building to recognize these exceptional lifesavers. And indeed, to have the participation of the Commandant, Admiral Allen; the Vice Commandant, Vice Admiral Pekoske; and the other senior leaders of our Coast Guard, certainly conveyed the extremely high regard that is so well deserved by these true heroes who put their own lives at risk to save others.

Not nearly as dramatic, but also important, your AFRAS Board of Directors met and reviewed progress and plans in regard to various AFRAS initiatives. It is indeed very gratifying to report that AFRAS is in better financial shape than any time in the recent past. Note that I didn't say great shape, but at least we are moving in the right direction. And for that, I would certainly like to thank our loyal members, and our corporate sponsors, who have helped us so that we can now look to a future where we can move forward on various projects ***“to foster traditional search and rescue values through suitable recognition, to facilitate international cooperation in search and rescue and to sustain voluntary search and rescue organization through dissemination of information and provision of financial support.”*** Those are very big tasks, but with everyone's help and support, the Association for Rescue At Sea can answer the call.

Captain Gabriel Kinney, USCG (Ret)

# 2009 AFRAS Gold Medal Award

*Aviation Survival Technician Second Class*

***Abram A. Heller***

***United States Coast Guard***

Petty Officer Abram Heller was awarded the prestigious AFRAS Gold Medal for his impressive actions while serving as a Rescue Swimmer aboard Coast Guard helicopter CGNR 6566 on 23 March 2008.

At 0300 on Easter morning the F/V ALASKA RANGER, a 192-foot catcher-processor with 47 persons on board, broadcast a distress call reporting that the vessel had lost its rudder and was taking on water in the Bering Sea, 125 NM west of Dutch Harbor Alaska. When CGNR 6566 arrived on scene, the fishing vessel had already foundered and the crew witnessed multiple life rafts and scattered blinking strobe lights across a mile-long debris field.



*AST2 Heller receives a pat on the back from Capt. Cashin, USCG.*

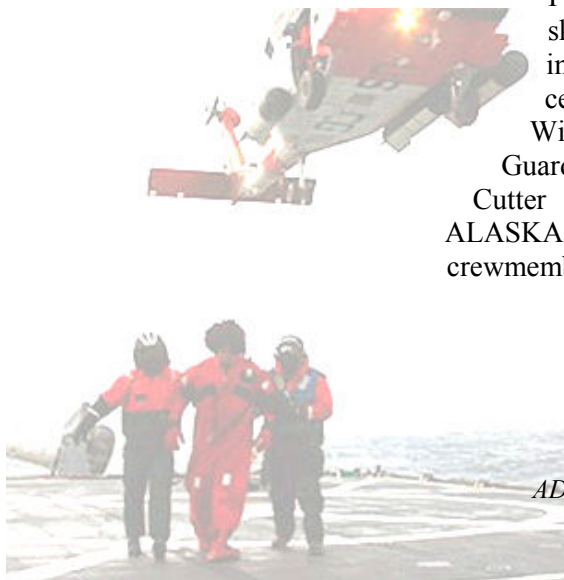
In 15-foot seas and 30-knot winds, the pilot of CGNR 6566 skillfully descended over the dark ocean and Rescue Swimmer Heller deployed into the 34-degree water and successfully rescued three of the mariners. Continuing his search, petty officer Heller carefully picked his way through the treacherous debris field and located two additional crewmen completely entangled in the sunken vessel's fishing gear. Working tenaciously beneath the icy waters, Heller disentangled the survivors from the netting and placed them in the helicopter's rescue basket. With the cabin now completely full and the helicopter perilously low on fuel, Heller requested a crew raft to use for himself and remaining survivors while CGNR 6566 departed into the darkness.

Petty officer Heller, now alone in the wind-swept seas, utilized all his strength, instinct and experience to assist three severely hypothermic fishermen into the life raft. As another rescue helicopter arrived an hour later, Heller returned to the frigid waters and placed the crewmen, one at a time, into the basket for recovery while suffering from severe hypothermia himself.

Petty Officer Heller's actions, skill and valor were instrumental in saving eight mariners from certain death in the Bering Sea. With the aid of a second Coast Guard helicopter, a Coast Guard Cutter and a sister ship to the ALASKA RANGER, 42 of the 47 crewmembers were saved that morning.



*ADM Thad Allen, Commandant USCG and Gold Medalist Heller.*





# AFRAS Silver Medal Award

# 2009



***R. Jeffrey Brooks  
Edward W. Parish  
William M. Shepard  
Robert O. Wells  
William E. Winfrey***  
***United States Coast Guard Auxiliary***

An AFRAS Silver medal was awarded to US Coast Guard Auxiliarists R. Jeffrey Brooks, Edward W. Parish, William M. Shepard, Robert O. Wells and William E. Winfrey for outstanding achievement in the performance of duty while serving aboard FACE

OFF, a 25-foot center-console angler. Following a routine training mission on 25 May, 2008 in the upper Gulf Coast of Florida's panhandle, the Auxiliarists were patrolling when alerted to a swimmer in distress just south of Laguna Beach.

FACE OFF was first to arrive on scene, followed by a Coast Guard utility boat, and the two began a sector search followed by a parallel track pattern. Air resources were called in to assist in the search for the initial victim (who in fact drowned) as well as 45 other swimmers who had been swept out to sea by the strong current along the five-mile stretch of shoreline. Many of the distressed swimmers were pulled in by police and fire rescue personnel and jet-ski rental vendors.

***...they nosed the  
boat forward even  
closer to the sandy  
bar well aware that  
if they went too far,  
the surf could easily  
capsize the vessel.***

After several hours of searching without success, the CG utility boat and the Auxiliary vessel began a search pattern with the Coast Guard vessel ahead of the patrol and several hundred yards further offshore. The FACE OFF crew searched just outside of the 4 to 5 foot breaking surf, while in the background the beach was lined with the flashing lights of dozens of emergency vehicles responding to the many other calls.

At sunset, the crew noticed a Panama City Beach Patrol deputy flashing his spotlight at them. Shepard, at the helm, carefully approached the breaking surf, enabling the crew to spot a man and woman desperately holding on to a small float board. Brooks helped to guide Shepard as they nosed the boat forward even closer to the sandy bar well aware that if they went too far, the surf could easily capsize the vessel. Auxiliarist Wells moved to the bow of FACE OFF and accurately threw a line to the victims. Shepard slowly backed the vessel from the dangerous surf line towing the exhausted swimmers, and although seas were still running 2 to 3 feet Auxiliarists Winfrey and Parish were able to pull the victims safely on board. One of the swimmers was exhibiting signs of shock, so the Auxiliarists covered the survivors with blankets and gave them warm water. After notifying Coast Guard Station Panama City of the rescue, the crew of FACE OFF took the victims to Lighthouse Marina in Grand Lagoon where they were eventually reunited with their families.

The actions of the coxswain and crew aboard USCG Auxiliary vessel FACE OFF are most heartily commended and in keeping with the highest traditions of the United States Coast Guard.

*Photo top left (l-r) Robert Wells, William Winfrey, Jeffrey Brooks, William Shepard and National Commodore Nicholas Kerigan, USCG Auxiliary. (Silver medalist Edward Parish was not present).*



*Congressman Howard Coble*



*VADM Terry Cross,  
AFRAS Chairman,  
presents the Amver  
plaque to Capt. Theo  
Vassilakis  
representing Tsakos  
Shipping*

Vicente, Portugal. Within two minutes of receiving the call Captain Lazaros was on the bridge directing the ship to proceed to the stricken sailboat.

Steering the 800 foot tanker towards the distress location Captain Lazaros notified Portuguese rescue authorities and ordered "all crew to standby on deck." Coordinating his efforts with Radio Lisboa, Captain Lazaros overheard a Portuguese rescue helicopter order the Swedish sailors into a lifeboat. "The sailors radioed the rescue helicopter and said they could not abandon ship in the rough weather because their lifeboat had been ripped from the sailboat and drifted away," Captain Lazaros added.



As weather conditions deteriorated (winds over 30 knots and waves over 15 feet) the rescue helicopter was unable to safely hoist the sailors and returned to base leaving the 107,000 ton dead weight tanker the only means of rescue for the sailors.

"I ordered the Sun Chaser to make fast to our port side amidships and had the crew lay down the pilot ladder," Captain Lazaros recounted in an email to the Amver center. Within two minutes of lowering the pilot ladder the first survivor was safely on board the Parthenon. Within three hours of receiving the call for help the Parthenon had rescued all four Swedish sailors. The survivors, two men and two women, were cared for aboard the Parthenon and taken to Setubal

where they were met by Portuguese officials.

The Automated Mutual Assistance Vessel Rescue System (Amver), sponsored by the United States Coast Guard, is a unique, computer-based, and voluntary global ship reporting system used worldwide by search and rescue authorities to arrange for assistance to persons in distress at sea. The Parthenon has been an Amver participant since 2003.

# AFRAS Amver Award

## M/V Parthenon

*THANK YOU  
2009 Platinum sponsors!*



**LOCKHEED MARTIN**

*We never forget who we're working for™*





# *AFRAS Welcomes new board members*

## **Vice Admiral Vivien S. Crea,**

### **USCG (Ret.)**

#### ***25<sup>th</sup> Vice-Commandant of the US Coast Guard***

As second in command of one of the United States Armed Forces, VADM Crea was the highest ranking woman in the history of the US Military. As a Lieutenant Commander, she became the first woman from any service, as well as the first service member from the US Coast Guard to serve as the Presidential Military Aide. She carried the nuclear football for President Ronald Reagan for three years.

VADM Crea assumed command of Coast Guard Atlantic Area in 2004. This post spans five CG Districts, involves over 33,000 military and civilian employees, and 30,000 Auxiliarists. Previously she had served as Commander, First Coast Guard District and prior to that, Director of Information and Technology of the CG as Chief Information Officer and oversaw the CG's Research and Development Program.

Earlier assignments include Chief, Office of Programs in Coast Guard Headquarters, Commanding Officer of Air Station Clearwater, Executive Assistant to the Commandant of the Coast Guard; Commanding Officer, Air Station Detroit; Operations Officer, Air Station Borinquen, P.R.; Coast Guard Aide to President Reagan; and many other operational assignments. As Coast Guard aviator, Vice Admiral Crea has flown the C-130 Hercules turboprop, HH-65 Dolphin helicopter, and Gulfstream II jet.

Crea earned a master's degree from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, as well as one from Central Michigan University, and a bachelor's degree from the University of Texas. Her personal awards include the Defense Superior Service Medal, the Legion of Merit (four awards), and the Meritorious Service Medal.

## **Sir Stuart Matthews**

Sir Matthews is well known throughout the worldwide aviation industry and has been recognized internationally as a leading aviation safety expert. Matthews spent 53 years in the aircraft manufacturing and air transport industries, both in Europe and North America until his retirement in early 2007. In 1974 he set up a subsidiary marketing company in North America for Fokker Aircraft, based in the Netherlands, and ran this organization for twenty years. He was credited with the sale of 150 commercial jet airliners to American Airlines, which at several billion dollars was not only the company's largest order ever, but the largest single commercial order ever booked by the Netherlands's industry.

Upon his retirement from Fokker in 1994 he was elected President and CEO of the Flight Safety Foundation, a major international non-profit organization with over 1,200 corporate members in some 150 countries around the world. The foundation is devoted to the continuous improvement of aviation safety. In this capacity, Matthews traveled the world promoting methods and best practices for enhancing the safety of aviation.

In 1994 Sir Stuart Matthews was honored by the Queen of the Netherlands when he was knighted in the Order of Orange Nassau for his services to aviation, an honor recognized by his native United Kingdom. He was also decorated by the Russian Federation for his assistance in helping to re-establish the safety of Russian aviation following the fall of the Soviet Union.

Sir Matthews resides with his wife Kaye Adams in Arlington, Virginia. He is a member of various aviation clubs and often speaks at meetings. Matthews is also a Life Governor of the Royal National Lifeboat Institute (RNLI). In his spare time, he is an avid boater and enjoys yachting on the Chesapeake Bay.

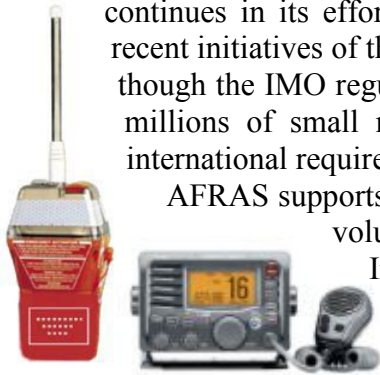
# GMDSS Task Force Small Vessel Radio Safety Initiative

As everyone associated with SAR and safety at sea is well aware, an effective means of communication is absolutely one of the most critical parts of the Search and Rescue System. Unfortunately every year lives are lost because of a lack of a means of distress notification.

Because of this, in the late 1990's, the International Maritime Organization (IMO) created the Global Maritime Distress and Safety System (GMDSS), which changed the focus of at-sea distress comms from ship-to-ship to ship-to-shore, so that a vessel in distress would hopefully have the many resources of the SAR System available to help, not just other mariners that happened to be in the immediate area.

In order to help with the implementation of GMDSS, the U.S. Coast Guard created a Task Force, which continues in its efforts to improve maritime communications policies and procedures. One of the recent initiatives of the GMDSS Task Force is a Small Vessel Radio Safety Initiative, which notes that though the IMO regulations require certain equipment of large commercial vessels, there are literally millions of small recreational vessels that routinely travel offshore, yet are not subject to the international requirements.

AFRAS supports the Task Force's recommendation that all vessels going a mile or more offshore voluntarily carry either a marine VHF-FM radio and/or an Emergency Position Indicating Radio Beacon (EPIRB) or Personal Locator Beacon (PLB).



They make great Christmas gifts, and the life you save may be your own.

## Join AFRAS

Afras is here to provide you with a means of supporting worldwide voluntary lifeboat services and at the same time, providing you with a tax deduction here in the United States.

### ***AFRAS offers two basic membership packages:***

The first, a joint membership with the Royal National Lifeboat Institution (RNLI) for dues of \$100 per year will provide you with a quarterly subscription to the RNLI's *Lifeboat* journal, their annual *Watermark* catalogue and other RNLI press releases and mailings throughout the year. We will also send you periodic AFRAS newsletters, press releases, and an invitation to our annual Gold Medal/Silver Medal/Amver award ceremony in Washington, D.C.

The second, a sole AFRAS membership for \$20 per year will entitle you to all Afras mailings including newsletters, press releases and miscellaneous information from our counterparts throughout the world.

***All dues and donations given through AFRAS are tax deductible in the United States.***

If you are interested in joining AFRAS please fill out the information below and send along with your dues/donation to  
*Association for Rescue at Sea, Inc., P. O. Box 565, Fish Creek, WI 54212-0565.*

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_ City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Phone \_\_\_\_\_ (day) \_\_\_\_\_ (evening) E-mail \_\_\_\_\_

Membership (check one) \_\_\_\_\_ AFRAS/RNLI (\$100 dues) \_\_\_\_\_ AFRAS (\$20 dues)

Dues enclosed \_\_\_\_\_ (amount) Donation enclosed \_\_\_\_\_ (amount)

I would like to find out more about AFRAS. Please send me more information.

