

# GOOD SHOW

A/1C HOWARD GRIFFUS

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The paramedic was left  
behind in the icy water . . .

**B**ELOW the hovering helicopter, a bare 10 feet down, murky, frigid waters slashed at the desperate airman. In these waters cold will kill in short order, for this was Cook Inlet, an arm of the Gulf of Alaska.

A/1C Howard Griffus, paramedic, stared hard at the ebbing efforts of the fellow flyer. In the water buoyed up by his life vest, 1st Lt. Eldon Anderson was fast approaching unconsciousness. Try as he might he could not fasten the dangling sling from the helicopter to himself.

Airman Griffus hardly thought of the paramedic precept that they "exist to save lives" as he picked up the intercom. "I'll jump—He needs help. 'And,' in the words of the H-19 commander, 1st Lt. Edward Grant, "with disregard for his own life, he then plunged into the icy waters."

Earlier at 2000 hours local, 11 June 1955, the pilot of the F-89 in which Lieutenant Anderson was radar observer, had declared an emergency. The RO hit the ejection lever and bailed out over Cook Inlet. In this northern latitude the temperature of the sea drops to 35°—3° above freezing.

When the crash phone rang that night at Elmendorf AFB, Airman Griffus was on duty as the SA-16 alert paramedic. He volunteered to go with the H-19 as hoist operator and medic. Minutes after the scramble horn sounded, the copter was airborne. It was the first plane off.

A light rain was falling out of a low overcast. Visibility was severely restricted by the rain and the dreary twilight of the Far North. Ten minutes after the H-19's takeoff, the

the MATS flyer





Lt. Eldon Anderson, right, thanks A/IC Howard Griffus for icy rescue.

pilot requested another helicopter to help because of the low visibility. The search began with two H-19's and an SA-16 amphibian.

"Upon arrival at the search area," wrote Lieutenant Grant, pilot of the first H-19, "a creeping line pattern was set up. After 45 minutes the SA-16 . . . sighted the downed airman." Almost immediately he was lost " . . . due to low visibility, high waves, and the absence of sea-marker dye." Twice he was lost and found.

Then, a third time the SA-16 spotted the survivor, who by now had been in the deadly waters more than an hour. "The helicopter was vectored to the man in the water," a report of the rescue explained. "The hoist and sling were made ready and lowered from the helicopter which was maintained in a hover.

"The aircrewman, being severely affected by the hour and thirty minutes of exposure to the 35° temperature of the water, was completely helpless and unable to get the hoist sling under his arms."

At this point the paramedic, Airman Griffus, moved to carry out his GOOD SHOW action. "Airman Griffus," the report continues, "fully aware of the treacherous tidal action, the heavy silt in the water, and its near freezing temperature . . . unhesitatingly and entirely on his own initiative leaped from the helicopter

and swam to the distressed man.

"He placed the sling about the radar observer, who was by now in an advanced state of shock, gave the signal for him to be raised, leaving himself in the water, his own flotation gear a life vest."

On rescue missions the aeromedic operates the hoist in the H-19 from the cabin. Griffus knew when he jumped that this would complicate, or seriously delay, his own rescue. Difficulty in bringing the RO aboard made it necessary for the helicopter to fly to the mudflats where Lieutenant Anderson was brought into the cabin. Within a short time he was in the hospital.

While the second helicopter, which did not have a hoist, hovered over Griffus, the SA-16 prepared to land and pick him up. Because of the low-lying fog bank it had to land 2 miles away and then taxied in for the second rescue. Waves were running high but the Albatross finally got back to Elmendorf at 2210 local time. Airman Griffus was in the icy waters 20 minutes.

Later it was learned that the pilot of the F-89 had tried to bail out but the seat ejection would not function. Then radar control made its contribution to the GOOD SHOW operation, and the pilot, 1st Lt. Paul Leming, was able to land safely.

An interesting sidelight on this

GOOD SHOW operation is the fact that at Elmendorf a 24-hour alert is not required for H-19 aircraft. Past experience, however, has proven such an alert valuable.

To provide this service without additional personnel, pilots of fixed wing aircraft stand by after normal duty hours to serve as copilots on H-19 missions. Elmendorf recommends that all flying personnel be briefed on such duty, particularly operation of the hoist.

The rescue demonstrated the fine teamwork and professional capability of the MATSmen at Elmendorf. For his unselfish deed Airman Griffus has been recommended for the Soldier's Medal. The name of Lieutenant Grant has been submitted for a civilian helicopter award.

"Airman Griffus' courageous act, committed in the full knowledge of the hazardous condition and the strong likelihood that hours might possibly elapse before his own recovery could be effected," the recommendation reads, "is an inspiring example of the airman who gives above and beyond the call of duty."

"His brave deed resulting in the saving of a human life greatly distinguished himself and reflected great credit upon his organization, the 71st Air Rescue Squadron, and upon the United States Air Force."