

**AFM reports on  
the dramatic  
Atlantic rescue by  
UK-based Special  
Operations Jolly  
Green Giants and  
Hercules.**

# SOS RESCUE

**O**N JANUARY 14, two USAF Super Jolly Green Giant helicopters from the 21st Special Operations Squadron (SOS) based at RAF Woodbridge, rescued 32 crew from a 42,000 tonne bulk carrier *Yarrowonga* foundering in an Atlantic storm.

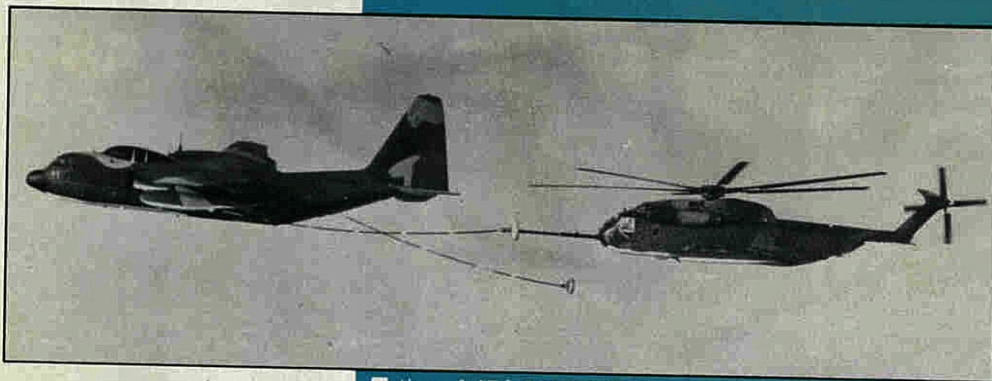
The ship had been holed below the water line and was drifting in high seas and a Force 8 gale some 400 nautical miles west of Ireland. There was a very real possibility of *Yarrowonga* breaking up in such conditions and the 21st SOS was put on alert after the Rescue Co-ordination Centre in Plymouth had received the distress signals on January 13.

Two MH-53J helicopters, and a supporting HC-130N Hercules tanker, was launched from Woodbridge that evening, but because of the severity of the weather, were unable to reach Shannon. The two helicopters left at 0630 the following morning, reaching the rescue area at 1115 after a flight of 1,700 nm having refuelled overhead Shannon from the HC-130.

The rescue mission was an international effort. Rescue operations were co-ordinated and supported by the Irish Rescue Co-ordination Centre at Shannon International Airport. RAF Nimrods of 42 Sqn at St Mawgan, flew 'top cover' and acted as communications centres while RAF Sea Kings stood by at Shannon to back-up the USAF helicopters.

A second HC-130N from NAS Keflavik in Iceland acting as a weather ship, was the first aircraft to make visual contact with the ship. Super Jolly Green Giant 14431 was the first helicopter to arrive over the stricken vessel, then drifting some 320 nautical miles from Shannon. The pilot, Capt Dennis M London had then to decide on the best method of taking off the crews in the prevailing conditions. He could either land on the deck, as an ex-US Coast Guard pilot he was cleared to do so, or lower his pararescue specialist (PJ) on the

Below: A 42 Sqn RAF Nimrod from St Mawgan over the crippled *Yarrowonga* in gale force conditions. (42 Sqn).



Above: A 67th SOS HC-130N air refuelling a 21st SOS Super Jolly Green Giant helicopter. (USAF).



Above: Crews of the MH-53Js and HC-130Ns at Shannon after the rescue in the Atlantic. (USAF).



hoist. With the *Yarrowonga* riding 30 feet high waves and a wind gusting across the deck at up to 50mph, Capt London chose the second option. A PJ from Detachment 4, 1730th Parachute Squadron at Woodbridge, was lowered onto a 10ft platform while the pilot fort to keep the MH-53J in a 50ft hover. Using a penetrator on the end of the cable, which has three fold-down seats, 17 members of the ship's crew were eventually winched aboard the helicopter three at a time.

On the return flight to Shannon, 431 refuelled from the Keflavik HC-130, which itself was running short of fuel. During the air refuelling, which took place in heavy turbulence between 500/1200ft, a hose basket was torn away.

However the two aircraft landed safely at Shannon while Capt David W Freeman in the second helicopter hovered over the ship to lift the

■ **A Super Jolly Green Giant of the 21st Special Operations Squadron hovers over the holed *Yarrowonga* lifting 17 crew members to safety from the stricken vessel. (21st SOS).**

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■ **Left: Some of the crew involved in the rescue pose in front of MH-53J, 976, at Woodbridge. L to R: PJ TSgt Emilio Jaso, crewman, Capt David W Freeman, Maj Steven W Weiss, crewman, PG Sgt Stephen B Elson. (Duncan Cubitt).**

■ **Above: The view of an HC-130N Hercules from the flight deck of a Jolly Green Giant during air refuelling. (David Oliver).**

■ **Right: The HC-130 tanker over the sea trailing hoses. (David Oliver).**

remaining crew members including the *Yarrowonga's* Captain and his wife. Following severe swinging of the cable during the first rescue, due to the high wind and rolling deck, the PJ used a tag line and lifted the crew two at a time.

After two hours on station, Capt Freeman headed for Shannon, now only 270 nm to the west, accompanied Major Steve W Weiss in the second Hercules tanker. The air refuelling en route, flown at approximately 1000ft at 110 knots during which fuel was transferred at a rate of 1,000 lb/min using the MH-53J's eight foot probe, was accomplished without mishap.

This had been the first rescue for the 21st and 67th Special Operations Squadrons, formerly the 67th Aerospace Rescue and Recovery Squadron, since they were formed on June 3, 1988 at RAF Woodbridge.

The Squadron's missions are to

help train and support US Special Operations forces with re-supply and airlift capability. Combat search and rescue is now the units' secondary role.

They are assigned to the Military Airlift Command, headquartered at Scott AFB, Illinois, while the parent unit, the 39th Special Operations Wing, is located at Hurlburt Field, Florida.

The 21st SOS operates five Sikorsky MH-53J *Super Jolly Green Giant* helicopters recently converted to PAVELOW 3 standards for enhanced night and adverse weather operations.

Powered by two 3,925 shp General Electric T64-GE-1 turboshafts, the MH-53, developed from the US Marine Corps' CH-53A during the Vietnam conflict, is the largest and most powerful helicopter in the USAF inventory. With a maximum speed of 170 knots, it can transport 38 combat equipped

troops on side-facing canvas seats, or 22 litter patients and four medical attendants, or 18,500 lbs of freight. An external cargo hook has a 20,000 lb capacity.

It is equipped with a 250 ft rescue cable, flight-refuelling probe and two 450 US gallon jettisonable long-range tanks fitted to sponsor extensions. As benefits its combat role, it is fitted with armour plated crew seats, two 315 US gallon self-sealing tanks, a radar warning receiver (RWR), chaff dispenser and can carry three 7.62mm miniguns capable of delivering suppressive fire of up to 4,000 rounds per minute.

USAF HH-53s were modified under the PAVELOW 3 programme to provide night search and rescue capability. These are equipped with forward looking infrared (FLIR), inertial and doppler navigation and terrain-following radar (TFR).

The normal crew of the *Super Jolly Green Giant* comprises pilot, co-pilot, flight engineer, pararescue specialist and aerial gunner. A second co-pilot, extra PJs and a flight surgeon are carried when necessary, such as the recent Atlantic rescue.

The pararescue specialists belong to a small, but elite unit, highly trained in free-fall parachuting, skuba diving, mountaineering, skiing, life support and weapons handling.

The 67th SOS operates six Lockheed HC-130N Hercules tankers used to refuel the helicopters and provide long range search and communications capabilities. Modifications to the HC-130 include updated engines and the fitting of search and rescue



equipment for the recovery of air crews and retrieval of space hardware. The SAR equipment includes four 7 place and one 20 place rafts, two litters, bunks, flare launchers and air droppable survival equipment. Two 1,800 US gallon fuel tanks can be fitted into the cargo hold. The HC-130N is fitted with underwing refuelling drogue pods for combat rescue missions.

Although the Woodbridge units have become Special Operations Squadrons, as opposed to Aerospace Rescue and Recovery Squadrons, it is comforting to know that they will still be available to assist the local authorities in peacetime SAR activities such as the *Yarrowonga* rescue.

■ Below: **One of five recently modified Sikorsky MH-53J PAVELOW 3 Super Jolly Green Giant helicopters operated by the 21st SOS at RAF Woodbridge.** (Duncan Cubitt).

■ Bottom: **One of the two HC-130Ns of the 67th SOS that took part in the *Yarrowonga* rescue, seen here on the ramp at NAS Keflavik. Hercules 95820 was the first aircraft to make visual contact with the ship.** (David Oliver).

