GOOD SHOW

By CAPT. PAUL S. EVANS
As told to CAPT. LEONARD C. HERR

General Joseph Smith, MATS Commander, wired Capt. Paul S. Evans and his crew “Congratulations on ditching job well done.” In this month’s GOOD SHOW, one of the most unusual yet reported in The MATS Flyer, it would not be stretching a point to say that the Coast Guard Cutter Coos Bay and its gallant crew have earned our GOOD SHOW honors, too.

“GOOD BLESS YOU,” was the last message received from the Coast Guard cutter. Eight lives rode with the MATS C-54 transport preparing to crash land into the stormy Atlantic on 26 January 1955.

Capt. Paul S. Evans shifted his vision from the searchlights and flares flickering in the pitch black night outside. Glancing at the 80 m. p. h. airspeed, he pulled off the power.

“Help me kick it out!” he yelled to copilot Lt. Jack W. Suggs.

In the second or two that remained before hitting the 15-foot waves, the C-54 had to be straightened out from the terrific crab caused by 42 knots of direct cross wind.

When MATS 45569 had started from Lajes carrying cargo and one passenger to Bermuda it had looked like any other routine flight.

At 1604 local time they were over a Coast Guard cutter, radio-coded “ECHO” and about 10 minutes behind schedule. Capt. Edward T. Cobb, the navigator, noticed that the winds were from 260 degrees at 42 knots, a little stronger than the forecast.

Twenty minutes later Lieutenant Bowen, the passenger, walked from the crew compartment to the cabin. He glanced out at the left wing as he passed. Then he looked hard.

It was still daylight, and he could see a heavy flow of vapor appearing to come from under the flap behind the No. 2 engine. He called A/1c Braun, the flight attendant, who checked and immediately went forward and told the aircraft commander, Captain Evans. T/Sgt. Brooks, engineer, came back and looked.

“Fuel leak and coming pretty heavy,” he told Captain Evans. Co-pilot Suggs came up and took over while Captain Evans looked for himself. With Sergeant Brooks he checked the fuel gauges. No. 2 was lower than any of the others.

“O. K., left cross feed—No. 2 main boost on.”

A good plan but No. 2 main tank gauge went down faster than gas could be pumped into No. 1. Only 40 gallons were saved—360 were lost.

Now with No. 1 and No. 2 engines both running off No. 1 main tank (and No. 2 main tank completely empty and cut off) the pilot and engineer checked again. It was still there. Same vapor trail. Same spot.

With reluctance the aircrew feathered No. 2 engine. It would be touch and go to make Bermuda with these winds.

Another check revealed the fuel leak had stopped. The navigator passed his position and flight data...
to Airman Hodge, the radio operator. Pilot Evans dropped 10 degrees of flaps and slowed up to 140 m. p. h. in order to jettison cargo.

Airman Hodge began transmitting. His message started off, “Emergency...”

Aircraft commander Evans, with five of the men went to the cabin, and with the crew ladder, pried open the forward cargo door enough to jettison the cargo. In 15 minutes, they had kicked out a ton and a half of cargo, mail and personal effects.

All this time, Captain Cobb and Lieutenant Suggs were up front checking fuel versus headwinds. The loss of No. 2 had cut the indicated airspeed down to about 150 m. p. h.

At 1650L (local), 46 minutes past ECHO, flight attendant Braun glanced out at the right wing and saw it—a heavy oil flow coming over the flap behind No. 3 engine. He started forward. At the same time, engineer Brooks checked his instruments and saw No. 3 oil pressure drop to 40 pounds. No. 3 oil quantity showed 15 gallons.

Brooks checked the wing and immediately started transferring from the 40 gallons in the auxiliary oil tank. Even with continuous transferring, the oil quantity gauge never came above 6 gallons; oil pressure never above 40 pounds. In 15 minutes, there was no more reserve oil.

Captain Evans watched closely. When the No. 3 manifold pressure started falling and the tachometer started fluctuating, he feathered No. 3 engine.

As they began descending to maintain airspeed, the navigator hollered, “Couldn’t make it to Bermuda anyway with this airspeed and our present winds. We don’t have a chance. Sorry, Skipper, that’s the best I can do for you.”

The ailing C-54 began a 180 degree turn back to ECHO, an estimated one hour and twenty minutes away. Hodge got ECHO again and advised them of their intention to rendezvous and ditch. It was getting dark now, and they were descending in the soup. The vacuum instruments were getting sloppy, so No. 2 was allowed to windmill for vacuum pressure. Lieutenant Suggs transmitted DF tones on 121.5 MC’s for the rescue aircraft.

At a thousand feet above the ocean they were 100 feet under the overcast and visual again.

With No. 2 engine windmilling, No. 3 feathered, No. 1 and 4 cowl flaps wide open, 40 to 45 inches of manifold pressure and 2,550 r. p. m., the pilot could only get 115 m. p. h.

No. 1 and 4 cylinder head temperatures were 220 degrees. When an attempt was made to increase the airspeed by feathering No. 2 propeller, the vacuum instruments became sloppy.

Outside, there was no visual reference. The overcast hid all stars above and with no lights on the ocean below, there was nothing but solid blackness ahead. Just BALL, MAG COMPASS and AIRSPEED for attitude indicators weren’t enough, so again No. 2 was windmilled to provide vacuum pressure for the gyro flight instruments.

On ETA, 1830L, they passed over ECHO. No need to check any longer. They could never make it to Lajes. Evans recalled the only other time he had come down on water had been to land an L-20 floatplane in Greenland—in daylight.

Aboard ECHO, the U. S. Coast Guard cutter COOS BAY, all hands were now in action. Almost one hour earlier the boys watching the evening movie heard the speaker blare out, “NOW HERE THIS—NOW HEAR THIS—MATS 45569 DITCHING—ALL HANDS TO DITCH AND RESCUE STATIONS.

Commander Vaughn ordered all engines ahead full for ditch and rescue operations. At 1817L the Combat Information Center on ECHO had 45569 in radar contact.

The C-54 requested a ditching heading and ECHO recommended 130 degrees; gave the winds as 230 degrees at 42 knots with waves 12 to 15 feet high, swells from 220 degrees. They recommended ditching parallel to the swell. MATS 45569 “Rogered.”

Minutes later at 1837L the COOS BAY commenced laying a 4,000 yard sea lane. They used 20 depth charge markers. It took them only eight minutes to lay those floating flare pots.

Cmdr. William S. Vaughn commanded the rescue ship Coos Bay.
The Coast Guard cutter then moved into position 1,200 yards upwind and to the right of the sea lane. They waited.

Back in the C-54 cabin everything was set—life rafts, Gibson Girl, Mae Wests—all checked. Jenkins and Braun stowed the Gibson Girl and life raft by the rear door. Then, Lieutenant Bowen helped them take a crew bunk mattress and place it against the forward cabin bulkhead. They strung a tiedown strap through the rings in the floor for a hand hold. They then waited.

As the transport completed a dry run over the sea lane, Captain Cobb secured his navigator's stool and removed the astrodome. He grabbed all of his navigational gear and ditching equipment and went back to the cabin.

Captain Evans gave the word and Cobb and Braun jettisoned the four crew bunks and place it against the forward cabin bulkhead. They checked themselves and ditching gear and went back to the cabin.

At 1900L ECHO advised, "Six and a half miles out on final. You need power for emergency pull up?"

Captain Evans answered, "No."

Instructions commenced for a PPI on the astrodome. So, up they went out onto the slippery back of their agitated monster. Flat on their stomacs, they were barely able to hold on.

The aircraft had weathervaned as soon as it stopped. It was now "bucking" like a mad Brahma bull.

In the cabin, the lights were still on. Brooks had left his seat on downwind. He stowed the crew compartment raft on the front of the lower crew bunk. He checked himself and everyone else for ditching gear and climbed in the lower crew bunk behind the raft.

The gutted transport now turned onto the base leg. Hodge stood up front and held the mike to Captain Evans' lips. The pilot didn't have enough hands for everything; both he and the copilot were flying the big plane now.

MATS 45569 then turned onto the last final approach it would ever make.

ECHO radar asked, "Have you power for emergency pull up?"

Captain Evans answered, "No."

Instructions commenced for a PPI final.

At 1900L ECHO advised, "Six and a half miles out on final. You need not acknowledge any more messages."

Hodge now started to secure for ditching. When he finished, he walked back to the cabin and joined the others.

Captain Evans brought the transport down slowly, a hundred feet per minute, crabbing hard to the right. He dropped 10 degrees of flaps and waited, then 10 more and waited. Two hundred feet off the water he dropped 10 more and slowed to 90 m. p. h.

Twenty feet off the water he dropped his last 10 degrees of flaps and slowed up to 80 m. p. h. ECHO was firing mortar flares for illumination at this time. Landing lights were left off.

The last words from ECHO were, "GOD BLESS YOU."

At exactly 1905L both pilots kicked hard left rudder. Power came off and they were down. They didn't hit, they skidded. No first impact and then a second more severe impact, just a very rapid, smooth deceleration. The touchdown was so gentle—despite the water hitting the tail—that Captain Evans was able to hold the control column with one hand.

Outside waves were running 12 to 15 feet; wind was about 42 knots. The aircraft had weathervaned as soon as it stopped. It was now "buckering" like a mad Brahma bull.

In the cabin, the lights were still on. Braun and Cobb threw the raft out of the main cargo door. They held it in close while Lieutenant Bowen climbed aboard. Jenkins managed to climb in. Between them, they got one more man aboard each time the raft moved in.

As soon as all five of them were on the raft, they pushed away from the airplane.

Up front, Captain Evans and Lieutenant Suggs had shielded their faces with their arms as soon as they had touched water. They really didn't need to for there was no jolt, no real impact.

Try as they might, they couldn't get the six-man raft through the astrodome. So, up they went onto the slippery back of their agitated monster. Flat on their stomacs, they were barely able to hold on.

The COOS BAY moved in at flank speed as 24-inch searchlights played on the scene.

The horizontal stabilizer of the aircraft was rising and falling about 10 feet with each swell. The flyers in the raft had drifted back almost under the tail. Each time the tail came down they managed to push away. They finally were clear of the tail, but couldn't return to the aircraft for the other three men.

Hodge advised ECHO with the emergency VHF radio that all of them were out—five in the raft and three on the top of the airplane.

At 1910L Lieutenant Ray Baetsen of the COOS BAY had the motor surfboat fighting through the snarling seas toward the downed airmen. The boat couldn't get in close enough, so the Coast Guard lieutenant had Captain Evans, Lieutenant Suggs and Sergeant Brooks slide back between the vertical stabilizer and wing and jump off into the water.

The three were only in the water (67 degree F.) for two minutes. One by one the crew of the surfboat lifted them aboard.

Lieutenant Baetsen then wheeled around and moved in on the raft. A line was secured, and one by one five more men were dragged aboard. Fourteen minutes from time of ditching all eight had been hauled into the surfboat.

Lieutenant Baetsen skillfully fought his way back to the COOS BAY. Finally, the hook up was accomplished.

At 1942L all were aboard the COOS BAY.

MATS 45569 was last seen still floating 40 minutes after it hit water. Captain Evans noted only slight damage as he exited. In fact a bent prop on No. 2 engine and the loss of its rear cowling was all the damage he remembered.

The aircrew was safe and deeply grateful to Commander W. S. Vaughn, Lieutenant J. G. Baetsen, Lieutenant J. G. Kearney, and the officers and men of ECHO, the U. S. Coast Guard cutter, COOS BAY (WAVP-376). The seamen who stand a lonesome watch so they will be there when you need them live by the code SEMPER PARATUS—ALWAYS READY.

Through fine piloting, and with the munificent support of the U. S. Coast Guard, MATS had kept eight live from the fury of the unforgiving sea.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Month</th>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>No. Aboard</th>
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<td>1952</td>
<td>Jan. 15</td>
<td>CV-240</td>
<td>East River, N. Y.</td>
<td>Undershot</td>
<td>36</td>
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<td>Jan. 21</td>
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<td>Hecate Strait, Wash.</td>
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<td>Apr. 11</td>
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<td>San Juan, P. R.</td>
<td>Engine</td>
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<td>52</td>
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<td>Aug. 26</td>
<td>Hermes</td>
<td>Nr Trapani, Sicily</td>
<td>Electrical system failed</td>
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<td>7</td>
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<td>1952</td>
<td>Nov. 7</td>
<td>Blimp</td>
<td>Nr Brunswick, Ga.</td>
<td>Gas-bag leak</td>
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<td>Dec. 6</td>
<td>DC-4</td>
<td>Nr Bermuda</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
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<td>Nr Kosong, Korea</td>
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<td>P2V</td>
<td>Nr Bermuda</td>
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<td>Aug. 15</td>
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<td>Nr Rhodes (Medit.)</td>
<td>Engine failure and nacelle damage</td>
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<td>B-29</td>
<td>Nr Nassau</td>
<td>Fire</td>
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<td>Jan. 18</td>
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