

Rescue of CDR T. E. WOOLCOCK, Pilot of Powerhouse 312 of 25 January 1968  
by Big Mother 73

169° 30'W - 106° 05'E

The crew of BM-73 was in SAR Alert-condition #1 on the USS DEMEY at South SAR station on the evening of 25 January 1968. At 1818 SAR alert flight quarters was sounded and the crew expeditiously manned BM-73. The USS DEMEY went into a tight right turn in order to expedite coming into the wind. This maneuver proved hazardous as the deck became awash, causing flight deck handlers to fall and the aircraft to slide on the wet deck. Due to the overcast skies and approaching sunset we decided to wait for the ASE to warm-up before attempting a take-off. While waiting to launch, Harbor Master II gave us an initial vector of 222°/37 miles to the SAR area. During this period the crewman mounted the M-60's, gave the pilot's their M-16's and arranged the first aid kit for immediate use.

After take-off at 1821 we headed 222°. LTJG ROONEY was flying the aircraft at 120 knots, which was the maximum possible speed. This air-speed required a minimum of 90% torque and was accompanied by tremendous vibrations. LT VON SYDOW handled the initial radio communications with Harbor Master II and Powerhouse 315. AX2 JONES and AN COCKERHAM loaded the M-60's and were given permission to clear them. Both weapons jammed and the crewman immediately mounted the spare M-60's. Enroute to the survivor we flew at 500' in order to maintain our radio and navigation reception. Approaching HON MAT Island, we descended to 100' to avoid the known AAA sites. Powerhouse 315, the survivor's wingman, was orbiting overhead at approximately 700' with a low fuel state. Powerhouse 305 returned to the USS CORAL SEA streaming fuel. At 100' we lost tacan reception but LTJG ROONEY heard a beeper and LT VON SYDOW got an ADF

out of 185° to the survivor. This vector was confirmed by a SUN KING aircraft (L2A), who was rapidly closing the area to assist the SAR effort. At 1839 LTJG ROONEY saw the HMS LORAIN and the U.S. DEW 315 suppressing the coastal defense sites in an attempt to aid the downed pilot. Bright red flashes were observed on the beach as well as splashes in the water close aboard both ships as the coastal defense sites returned the fire. At 1841 LT VON SYDOW spotted Powerhouse 315 orbiting overhead. At this time Powerhouse 315 directed us to head 180°. Closing the area LTJG ROONEY spotted the survivor in his raft, between the PERTH and the beach. LT VON SYDOW took control of the aircraft and entered a manual hover. AX2 JONES reported he had the survivor in sight and began lowering the hoist. AN COCKERHAM left the forward gun position to go aft and assist JONES in hoisting the survivor. JONES reported the pilot appeared to be in good condition and having no apparent trouble. Therefore, JONES decided COCKERHAM would not have to enter the water to assist the survivor. Approaching the hover, we noticed the survivor was floating in his ME-3C and had the raft attached to himself. The rotor wash kept blowing the survivor away from the aircraft. JONES let out the cable and directed LT VON SYDOW to back the aircraft to the survivor pulling the horse collar and cable through the water. The survivor grabbed the cable, followed it to the sling and was able to successfully enter the horse collar. JONES brought the survivor up alongside the aircraft and encountered great difficulty bringing him past the M-60 mount. At 1845 the survivor was aboard. With night fall upon us LTJG ROONEY monitored the instructions while handling all radio communications. During the hover, the SUN KING aircraft and Harbor Master II requested the condition of the pilot. We

advised them that he seemed to be in good condition. At this time SUN KING advised us to expedite departing the area because of SAM's and heavy AAA fire from the beach. We departed to the North East at 2000 yards and 40° until clear of the shore batteries and HOW HAT Island.

AX2 JONES and AN COCKERHAM reported that the survivor was seriously wounded on the hand and they had applied a battle dressing to stop further bleeding. Continuing treatment for shock, they wrapped the survivor in blankets and gave him brandy from the first aid kit. Harbor Master II directed us to return to the USS DEWEY, so that the Medical Officer could treat the wound. The doctor gave the pilot dry clothes, and after inspecting the wound recommended we fly the survivor to the USS RANGER for emergency treatment. At 1930, we launched from the USS DEWEY under extremely poor lighting conditions. This necessitated using our hover lights for a visual reference of the ship. Upon return to the RANGER CDR T. E. WOOLCOCK underwent an emergency operation which lasted approximately 4 hours. The next day he was reported to be in satisfactory condition.