Book Reviews

Adak: The Rescue of Alfa Foxtrot 586

Andrew C. A. Jampoler

Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2003

US \$28.95, 218 pages, hardcover

On October 26, 1978, a US Navy P-3C Orion patrol bomber suffered a catastrophic failure in 1 of its 4 engines, forcing it to crash-land in the ocean 235 miles west of Shemya, a small Aleutian island. Ten men of the 15-man crew survived and were rescued by a Russian fishing trawler.

The bare facts of the case were reported in the media, along with the then-unusual circumstances of a US military aircrew being rescued by a Russian ship. There was a minor amount of media interest in the incident, but other news quickly crowded this incident out of the public mind, even in Mountain View, CA, where the aircraft was home based.

Published on the 25th anniversary of the crash, *Adak: The Rescue of Alfa Foxtrot 586* tells the story of that P-3C mission, codenamed Alfa Foxtrot 586, and more importantly the story of its crew. The author, Andrew Jampoler—a former P-3 pilot, P-3 squadron commander, and commander of Naval Air Station Moffett Field, where the aircraft and crew were based—does an outstanding job of taking the bare facts of the crash (illustrated by the dry, clinical ‘Findings of Fact’ statements from the Navy Judge Advocate General report of the mishap) and building the story of a crew quietly but desperately trying to nurse the mortally injured aircraft back to land, only to fail and have to ditch it in 20-foot seas. From the first indication of trouble in the left outboard engine until the surviving crewmen returned to Moffett Field, Jampoler tells this story in a detailed but personal narrative that could be written only by someone who had repeatedly flown those same routes.

Those of us who have spent time in military aviation will find some of this story tragically familiar: a small mechanical problem becoming a large mechanical problem and then a catastrophic failure; a crew doing everything possible to save the aircraft, communicate with rescue personnel, and return to a safe haven while simultaneously preparing for a crash. What may not be familiar is the backdrop of the Cold War. Today, it may seem strange that the crew were concerned about saying they had destroyed all classified material before ditching and about being interrogated by their rescuers. But that was the world of military aviation in the late 1970s.

Even for readers unfamiliar with military aviation, this is a well-told tale of what can go wrong in the air, the struggle to survive in horrendous weather conditions,

and the seemingly trivial details that can make the difference between life and death in extreme conditions.

This book resonated with me. I was living in Mountain View in 1978 and had just received my acceptance to medical school when the crash occurred. The P-3's landing at Moffett Field flew right over my apartment. I remember wondering what happened to the aircraft, but other things seemed more important at the time. I pretty much forgot about the incident until I read this book. Now, as I sit in my office, not 50 feet from the ditching simulator where the Air Force teaches water survival for medical aircrew, I am once again reminded of how fast things can go wrong and of the need to be ready to respond to sudden emergencies. That is a lesson all of us in wilderness medicine need to take to heart. This is the first book written by Andrew Jampoler; I look forward to reading more of his work.

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Morchilla & Ptarmagon

Hugh Montgomery

London, UK: Morchilla Press, 2003 (limited edition)

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There is no such thing as an extraordinary person but ordinary people doing extraordinary things. Anyone can achieve things beyond their imagination if they only stretch their imagination a little.

Sundeep Dhillon

In November 2003, I had the good fortune to serve as a lecturer at a conference entitled “The Great Escape: An International Conference in Wilderness Medicine for Medical Students.” Held at the John Radcliffe Hospital in Oxford, England, this meeting brought together students from all over the United Kingdom, most of whom were members of student chapters of the Wilderness Medical Society. They were treated to 2 days of lectures and demonstrations aimed at imparting medical knowledge and offering inspiration for physicians-in-training who dream of exciting adventures. The speakers were chosen both for their medical credibility and for their ability to convert a vocational passion to professional reality.

The faculty were brilliant. One such example was Dr Sundeep Dhillon, who in 1998 became the youngest person to climb the Seven Summits—the highest mountains on each of the continents. He presented a tale of his exploits in customarily modest fashion, letting his wonderful photographs and understated comments rivet the