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)

UK £75, US \$135.50, 100 pages, hardcover

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

attention of every listener, including me. His personal history has been full of challenges and triumphs in such a way that wilderness medicine is well served for a role model by this rising star. For his early accomplishments in life (for he is a young man), and I believe for courtesy and strength of moral character, he was chosen as an allegorical character for Hugh Montgomery's new book *Morchilla & Ptarmagon*.

Briefly, Sundeep has sought challenges since the age of 13, when he lost his parents. As a young man, he followed Hannibal's route across the Pyrenees and Alps riding a bicycle. He was selected to read medicine at Oxford, where his interest in exploration grew, and he became Chairman of the Oxford University Exploration Club. He led a research expedition to Mt Kanchenjunga, the world's third-highest mountain. During a summit attempt on Mt Everest in 1996, weather forced him to turn back 400 m below the peak and to bury a fellow climber on the way down. Two years later, Sundeep made it to the top. His final ascent was delayed as he helped others to safety who were injured or dying from altitude sickness, giving up his oxygen at over 8000 m and risking his own life to save other climbers. A major in the British Army, where he specializes in remote medical care, and the youngest member of the Council of the Royal Geographical Society, Sundeep has been an explorer or medical expert in virtually every wilderness terrain in more than 40 countries, from deserts to mountain tops and from the ocean depths to aerospace. He lives on the edge. However, his enduring strength is not recklessness but educated perseverance.

The author, Dr Hugh Montgomery, is an accomplished physician and writer and a good friend of Sundeep. Dr Montgomery was raised in Plymouth, England, where he spent much of his youth on or under the waves. A keen diver, mountain climber, and skydiver, he was part of the team that salvaged Henry VIII's flagship, *The Mary Rose*. An accomplished cardiovascular geneticist, his research has been directed at fitness, human performance, inflammation, and metabolic efficiency. He is also a consultant in intensive care. Like many physicians drawn to wilderness medicine, he is a self-motivated renaissance man. When he could not find a publisher for his wonderful epic, *The Voyage of the Arctic Tern*, he self-published a limited edition of the book, postponing his marriage and mortgaging his home in the process. The book won awards in the United Kingdom for Self-Published Book of the Year and Poetry Book of the Year Award 2000.

Now we have a different type of book from this author. Set in the high mountain ranges of the world, *Morchilla & Ptarmagon* is the tale of the orphan boy Sundeep and his quest to know the truth about his lost fam-

ily. In a mythical way, the themes of childhood, familial love, the wisdom of elders, hardship, and sacrifice are woven into a setting that takes advantage of Montgomery's understanding of the different physiological worlds of lowlanders and mountain inhabitants. It is a fable for adults, more so than light reading for a child. I would expect to need to explain much of what is written to any youngster who attempts to comprehend what is offered by this book. Furthermore, it is not a book that is easy to read in a casual fashion. I found myself rereading sections more than once to keep the characters and story line organized in my thoughts. If you let yourself go with the book, it becomes very personal, undoubtedly because it was written to represent at least part of what has been the experience of its namesake, Sundeep Dhillon. However, for those who have had their own rugged, and perhaps premature, entries into adulthood, it will take on its own meaning. In the end is resolution, but whether or not this represents triumph, contentment, or merely the natural order of things is for the reader to determine. I did not find myself profoundly moved by the story, but I was certainly contented by its conclusion. Montgomery is a clever writer who makes good use of analogies and alliteration, so the imagery is best characterized as sumptuous.

The book is beautifully illustrated in color on nearly every page with photographs taken in the Alps, Himalayas, and Andes. I found myself absorbed in the prose at times to such a degree that I did not fully appreciate the arctic contribution made by the uncomplicated and splendid art. It is useful to stop for a moment after each page turn to register the visual and then continue with the reading, for the art truly sets the tone. The photos are all of alpine environs, so the mood is mountainous and at times even celestial. It is a world of rarefied air; breathlessness; clouds; and cold, blue ice. We do not learn or feel much about the lowlanders, because they have left the comfort and familiarity for what exists above them, which is often dangerous and unknown.

This is a fascinating creative effort worth a read by the contemplative among us. It will appeal to persons who believe that spirituality is consistent with the wonders of nature and who perhaps can recall the times when they believed in loyalty, undying devotion, and mountain kings.

You can obtain the book now as a self-published limited edition for collectors (only 500 copies are being produced), signed by the author and Sundeep Dhillon, by writing Hugh Montgomery, 45 Sharon Gardens, South Hackney London E9 7RX.

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