



## “Galaxy” Explodes, Weather Fights Rescue

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On 20 October 2002, the large fishing vessel **Galaxy** sent a mayday reporting that the ship had exploded while sailing in the Bering Sea.

The U.S. Coast Guard (USCG) Kodiak Station received the call at 4:30 pm AST that Sunday in which a **Galaxy** crewmember reported that the vessel exploded and caught fire, forcing the crew to prepare to abandon ship.

Three **Galaxy** crew members became trapped in the wheelhouse, and three others couldn't escape from the bow, prompting a USCG helicopter crew to hoist the six people to safety, but the rest of the crew jumped into the cold water. Many of the men who went overboard were not wearing survival suits. Two of the twenty-six men who were aboard the **Galaxy** when it exploded are still missing, and one has been reported dead.

USCG PAO Lt. Jim Zawrotny said, “It was scary, knowing these people were out on a boat [in cold water] where their choice was to freeze or to burn.”

The USCG, along with the 210th Rescue Squadron of the Alaska Air National Guard, the U.S. Air Force, and the fishing vessels **Glacier Bay**, **Blue Pacific**, and **Clipper Express**, searched for over 50 hours for the two missing men before the USCG suspended its search at 7 p.m. Tuesday, 22 October 2002.

Tragically, a crewman from the **Clipper Express**, assisting in the

search of the missing **Galaxy** crewmen, had fallen overboard at around 10 a.m. AST that day about 90 miles south of St. Paul Island.

The **Clipper Express** was on its way to Dutch Harbor to off-load two **Galaxy** crewmen they had picked up Sunday evening. At the time that the **Clipper Express** lost a crewman, it was braving 30-foot seas and 50-60 knot winds as it sailed to bring survivors to safety. It is believed Daniel Schmiedt of the **Clipper Express** went missing after being struck by a rogue wave during the rescue.

To help locate the missing **Clipper Express** crewman, U.S. Coast Guard rescue crews diverted one of the two USCG helicopters in the **Galaxy** search area south. The USCG and the **Clipper Express** searched for over 10 hours for Schmiedt, and the Coast Guard suspended its search at 8:15 p.m. AST Tuesday, 22 October 2002.

Chief Petty Officer Marsha Delaney was aboard a Coast Guard C-130 that supported and then took part in the



The burnt hull of the **Galaxy** drifts aimlessly in Alaskan waters. USCG Rescue Squadron Kodiak led the rescue.

(Official U.S. Coast Guard photo courtesy of LT. Dave Wierenga, Air Station Kodiak and Petty Officer Carlene Adams, Long Range Navigation Station, St. Paul Island)

rescue efforts for the **Galaxy**.

“According to initial interviews with the crew [survivors of the **Galaxy**], the fire engulfed the ship so fast that split second decisions had to be made about jumping into cold water without survival suits,” Chief Delaney said.

During the rescue, the weather became a problem. “We were getting thrown around pretty bad up there.” Delaney said.

To complicate things for the search, there was no fuel available for aircraft at St. Paul Island. The C-130 that Chief Delaney was aboard first had to deliver fuel to St. Paul Island to refuel two H-60, and one H-65 helicopters before continuing to help with the search.



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The **USGC Cutter Jarvis** based in Honolulu Hawaii, was in the area and sent its H-65 “Dolphin” helicopter to assist in the rescue. As the weather turned foul during the rescue, it soon became apparent that the helicopter would be unable to return to the Jarvis, so the H-65’s crew landed in St. Paul and spent the night.

Details regarding what caused the explosion had not been released at the time this issue was in production. ⚓



**The Galaxy still smokes from the fire that engulfed it.**

*(Official U.S. Coast Guard photo courtesy of LT. Dave Wierenga, Air Station Kodiak and Petty Officer Carlene Adams, Long Range Navigation Station, St. Paul Island)*