



On August 13, 1993, while returning from a mission in the Russian Far East town of Lavrentiya, a charter missionary plane with seven on board lost one engine at 7,000 feet and the other, 9 minutes later, at 3,500 feet. The plane fell 3,500 feet in 3 1/2 minutes and plowed into the Bering Sea at 90 MPH.



It took the seven on board this flight about one minute to get out of the aircraft; one minute later the plane sank.

On board were: Dave and Barb Anderson from Phoenix, Arizona, keyboardist Cary Dietsche from Amery, Wisconsin, singer/songwriter Don Wharton from Nashville, Tennessee, soundman/roadie Brian Brasher from St. Louis, Missouri, passenger Pam Swedberg from Kenai, Alaska, and pilot Dave Cochran from Soldotna, Alaska.

The group found themselves in 3'-5' swells, 2 1/2 miles west of Sledge Island; 22 1/2 miles west of Nome, Alaska; about 100 miles south of the Arctic Circle.

The water temperature was about 36F degrees. (Life expectancy is between 5 and 15 minutes in 36-degree water).

They had no life-jackets or a raft but they did hang on to 5-gallon gas cans which were inside the plane, being brought back to Alaska empty to be filled for possible future humanitarian and missionary flights back to the Russian Far East.

Anchorage Air Traffic Controllers heard the pilot's distress calls as each engine quit. After several minutes they were able to contact a Bering Air flight in the area, asking the pilot if he had "seen anything" as he flew along the same route as the ill-fated missionary plane. His recorded response was, "eight minutes ago we thought we saw the tail of a whale; it could have been the tail of a plane"!

Returning to the approximate crash area, he circled for a number of minutes, and, just before giving up, a passenger said, "go around one more time; I think I saw something". Shortly afterwards they reported that some people appeared to be still alive, splashing in the water. The crash victims were spotted twenty minutes after the crash.

Twenty more minutes went by before two helicopters came from Nome...neither of which was equipped to rescue anyone from anything! Aboard one of the helicopters, besides the pilot,

were two men (an Evergreen Aviation mechanic and a volunteer from the Nome Fire Department) and seven body bags. Besides the other helicopter's pilot was one passenger, a Canadian geophysical surveyor.

For twenty-five minutes these helicopter pilots lowered their aircraft down to and into the swells of Norton Sound. The men aboard had to get out of the helicopters and reach out to totally helpless people and try, with incredible commitment, to get them into the helicopters one and two at a time. They were placed on the top of Sledge Island--760' above the water--and then the helicopters returned to the ocean to rescue another person or two.

Dave Anderson, Cary Dietsche, and Dave Cochran were in the water about 45 minutes. Don Wharton, Barb Anderson, and Pam Swedberg were in the water about 55 minutes. Brian Brasher was in the water 65 minutes.

As Dave Miles, Barb Anderson's rescuer, reached out to her he hung on to the helicopter with one hand and making contact with Barb with the other. Once he held her arm, he could not get her into the aircraft because the fibre-filled coat she was wearing weighed 50 lbs (wet). So he put her neck between his knees, twisted his feet around her body, and told the pilot to "take off". The pilot took off and Barb dangled by her neck for 2 1/2 miles and then 150 feet from Sledge Island, she fell from his grasp, back into the water the second time. Dave Miles risked his life to save her the second time!

Eventually all seven missionaries were placed on the top of Sledge Island and were, along with their rescuers, repositioned in the two helicopters and flown to the Nome airport where ambulances were waiting to take them to the Norton Sound Regional Medical Center.

In 1994 the two helicopter pilots, Eric Penttila of Evergreen Aviation and Walt Greaves of ERA Aviation, were honored for having done the most heroic helicopter flying in the entire world in 1993!

Barbara Anderson's rescuer, Dave Miles, was the only Canadian in history to receive the American "Medal of Heroism", the highest award the US Government gives to a civilian for heroism.

According to Dave Anderson, "all 13 people involved in our rescue are heroes and we don't let them forget that we appreciate what they did to bring about our rescue from totally impossible circumstances".

This story has been told in a book and video called, "The Rescue".
Download the Rescue Flyer in PDF [here](#), or in editable Word format suitable for concert promotions [here](#)