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It was another early Friday morning for the crew of a Coast Guard HC-130 Hercules based out of Coast Guard Air Station Elizabeth City, N.C. Fifty-knot winds roared around the airframe while the crew scoured the dark cauldron of 20-foot seas below for a boat. Rain lashed the plane, reducing visibility to less than a mile. Radar was next to useless and no one had been able to contact the distressed vessel.

The only thing guiding the crew was an unregistered, but active, emergency position-indicating radio beacon, broadcasting a signal approximately 680 miles east from the U.S. and 75 miles north of Bermuda.

Coast Guard watchstanders at the 5th District Command Center in [Portsmouth](#), Va., had received the EPIRB broadcast at 1:39 a.m., Feb. 9, and immediately reached out to partner agencies in Bermuda to confirm the distress signal.



The sailing vessel Wolfhound is seen here approximately 80 miles north of Bermuda in the FLIR camera of a Coast Guard HC-130 Hercules from Air Station Elizabeth City, N.C., Feb. 9, 2013. U.S. Coast Guard photo by Petty Officer 3rd class Sarah Bachman and Petty Officer 3rd Class Jeremiah Strombeck

With the beacon unregistered, neither Rescue Coordination Center Bermuda nor the Coast Guard knew who or what they were searching for, or if the vessel had other means of communication available to them. In contrast, with a properly registered beacon, information regarding the vessels type, [color](#), communication equipment and alternative contacts is quickly available. It would also expedite Coast Guard notification and nearly eliminate the information gathering process, allowing responders to focus primarily on the rescue efforts.



n emergency position
indicating radio beacon is
shown secured to a 25-foot

Response Boat-Small at
Coast Guard Station Curtis
Bay. U.S. Coast Guard
photo by Petty Officer 2nd
Class Brandyn Hill.

Coast Guard watchstanders launched a crew aboard a Hercules aircraft with an operational range of 2,487 miles at approximately 3:45 a.m. while RCC Bermuda reached out through AMVER, the automated mutual-assistance vessel rescue system, to locate nearby a crew of a commercial ship willing to lend a helping hand.

“Typically there are too few rescue boats, cutters, patrol boats, helicopters and aircraft to cover every square mile of ocean,” said Ben Strong of AMVER Maritime Relations. “With AMVER, there are over 21,000 commercial ships that are participating in this search and rescue program.”

The morning of Feb. 9, the crews of the merchant vessels Tetien [Trader](#) and the Eurochampion, both more than 80 miles away, responded to the AMVER request and diverted their courses to assist.

Meanwhile, in the air, the Hercules crew used the EPIRB signal to hone in on the distressed vessel, but weather and sea conditions were hampering the search effort.

“There was no moon, and multiple cloud layers and thunderstorm cells blocked any available light provided by the stars,” said Lt. j.g. Caleb Thorp, the Hercules pilot. “The rain was near continuous, which reflected any light emitted from the aircraft and caused our [night vision goggles](#) to be useless. So we secured as many lights on the aircraft as possible to aid the search outside. We could only see straight down where we saw very rough seas.”

Finally, through the waves and winds, the C-130 crew received a blip on their radar that matched the profile of a sailboat.

Unable to actually see the vessel, and failing to establish communications over the radio, the Hercules crew began to fly over the boat’s location, flashing the plane’s wing tip landing lights to grab the crew’s attention.



The sailing vessel Wolfhound is seen here approximately 80-miles north of Bermuda in the FLIR camera of a Coast Guard HC-130 Hercules from Air Station Elizabeth City, N.C., Feb. 9, 2013. U.S. Coast Guard photo by Petty Officer 3rd class Sarah Bachman and

Petty Officer 3rd Class Jerimiah
Strombeck

“We couldn’t see anything on the first pass, but on the second pass we saw a light cutting through the blowing rain,” said Thorp. “We flashed our lights and the sailing vessel flashed a handheld light back at the aircraft.”

The sailing vessel, later identified as the 48-foot long Wolfhound, lost all power and was at the mercy of the Atlantic Ocean. With the power out, its radio was useless, and the four Irish nationals aboard had no other means of contacting a rescue agency.

Within six hours, both of the AMVER merchant vessels arrived on scene, led there by the Hercules crew. The crew of the 738-foot Tetian Trader eventually came alongside the Wolfhound and helped the crew leave their stricken ship.

On average, there is a commercial ship in the AMVER system that is involved in saving a life somewhere in the world every 33 hours.

The rescue of the crew aboard the Wolfhound demonstrates how the culmination of EPIRB technology and the partnerships between multiple agencies save lives. The only other thing that might have better facilitated this successful search and rescue effort would have been if the sailboat’s EPIRB had been registered and up to date. With an unregistered EPIRB, a distress alert may be delayed before reaching the Coast Guard, often in situations in which there is not a moment to spare.



Lt. j.g. Caleb Thorp, an HC-130 Hercules pilot, is shown here on the tarmac of Coast Guard Air Station Elizabeth City, N.C., Feb. 20, 2013. Thorp was the pilot of a Hercules in a distress case involving the sailing vessel Wolfhound, located 680 miles east of North Carolina and 75 miles north of Bermuda on Feb. 9, 2013. U.S. Coast Guard photo by Petty Officer 3rd Class David Weydert



A Coast Guard HC-130 Hercules aircrew consisting of Lt. j.g Kevin Clark, Petty Officer 3rd class Sarah Bachman, Petty Officer 3rd Class Jimmy Feenstra, Petty Officer 1st Class Micah DeVries, Lt. j.g. Caleb Thorp, and Petty Officer 3rd Class Jeremiah Strombeck are shown at Coast Guard Air Station Elizabeth City, N.C., Feb. 20, 2013. The aircrew, including Petty Officer 2nd Class Cory Salamon, not shown, had responded to a distress alert from the sailing vessel Wolfhound, located 680 miles east of North Carolina and 75 miles north of Bermuda on Feb. 9, 2013. U.S. Coast Guard photo by Petty Officer 3rd Class David Weydert

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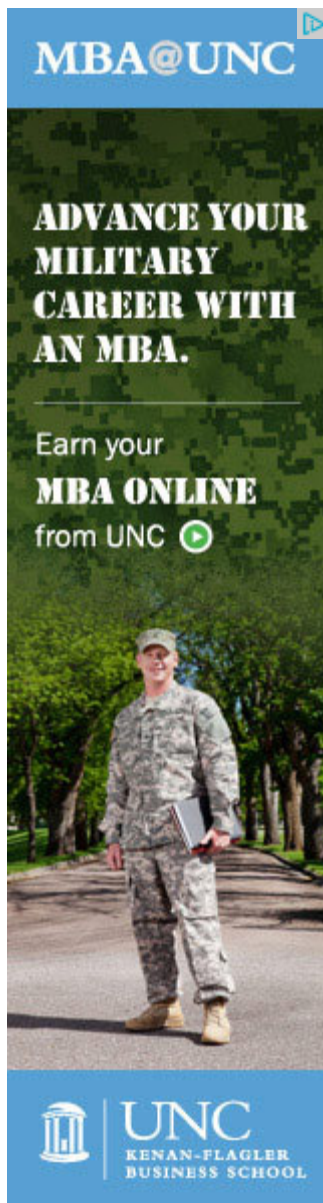
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