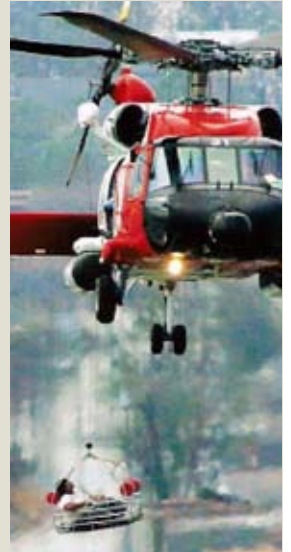




# Sikorsky Archives News

Published by the Igor I. Sikorsky Historical Archives, Inc. M/S S578A, 6900 Main St., Stratford CT 06615



Millions have been rescued by Igor Sikorsky's "*Angels of Mercy.*" His Spirit lives on -- Saving lives.

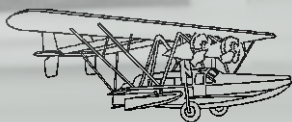
The helicopter's humanitarian heritage began with the Sikorsky R-4 (HNS-1) on January 3, 1944. An explosion aboard the U.S. Navy destroyer Turner required blood plasma for injured crewmen. The medical supplies were delivered by the R-4, piloted by U.S. Coast Guard Commander

Frank Erickson saving dozens of lives. Since then, more than three million lives worldwide have been saved from peril by all helicopter type models, flying search and rescue and relief missions during natural disasters, during rescue missions in strife-torn parts of the world, and medevac missions

where the mere ticking of the clock is the sound of adversity. This issue of the newsletter is a sequel to the January 2006 Rescue Issue. Future issues will continue the coverage of rescue missions and the heroes who have put their lives on the line so that others may live.



IGOR I. SIKORSKY HISTORICAL ARCHIVES, INC.



(203) 386-4356 | (203) 386-4218

April, 2011

Visit us at [Sikorskyarchives.com](http://Sikorskyarchives.com)

Contact us at [iisha@snet.net](mailto:iisha@snet.net)

# 1940s



The early Sikorsky helicopters operated by the U.S. Army Air Forces and the U.S. Coast Guard during the mid 1940s were light gross weight aircraft that performed rescue missions which could not be accomplished by any other aircraft in existence at the time. In addition to the first humanitarian rescue on page 1, the following rescue missions are recorded in the personal files of Sergei Sikorsky:

**April 26, and 27, 1944-** Lt. Carter Harman, USAAF member of the First Air Commando Group, ferried his R-4 some 500 miles along the border of Japanese held Burma to a secret airstrip. From there, he flew deeper into enemy territory to rescue three wounded British Commandos and their American pilot, stranded after their medevac plane had been shot down by enemy ground fire.

**April 30, 1945-** Lt. "Gus" Kleisch, USCG starts flying eleven RCAF air crew out of their crashed PBY "Catalina". Marooned for twelve days in Northern Labrador after their crash, their numbers are increased as two rescue planes are trapped in the rapidly melting snow/tundra and cannot take off. The RCAF requests USAAF help, and Kleisch and his HNS-1 (R-4) are flown from Floyd Bennett Field to Goose Bay by USAAF C-54. The helicopter is reassembled. Kleisch flies 150 miles to a forward base, and then shuttles back and forth another 30 miles to the crash site. The last crewman is flown out on May 2, and Kleisch returns to Goose Bay for the trip home.

**June, 1945-** Lts. Brown, Carle and Cowgill USAAF, jointly rescued 34 critically wounded soldiers from northern Luzon, where the terrain make it impossible to evacuate them by any other means except the R-4 helicopter. During the last two weeks of June, 1945, between two and three medevac missions were accomplished per day.

**September 22-23, 1946-** Four Coast guard pilots, CDR Frank Erickson, LT's Stew Graham, Gus Kleisch, and Walt Bolton from Floyd Bennett Air Station evacuated eighteen survivors of a Belgian airliner crash thirty miles south west of Gander, Newfoundland. Due to the weather and swampy terrain, it was impossible to evacuate the injured survivors by land. Two helicopters, a HNS-1 (R-4) and a HOS-1 (R-6) with a Stokes litter attachment were airlifted to Gander via USAAF C-54, performed evacuation missions in two days, shuttling between the aircraft wreckage and Gander Airport. After surveying the crash site, it was decided to drop lumber at the clearing nearest the site to construct a small platform as the muskeg would not support the weight of the helicopter. A second platform was built on the edge of a lake 7 miles from the clearing so that survivors could be transferred to PBY's and flown to Gander. The helicopters made forty flights into the clearing on wooden platforms. *The four photos shown below depict the rescue efforts in Newfoundland.*



Crash Site



R-4 landing on platform to pick up survivor



R-6 landing on platform on the muskeg surface



Transferring survivors via life raft to PBY





Experience with the early Sikorsky helicopters demonstrated that they were proven rescue vehicles, and the desire for carrying more payload and passengers created the development of the larger cabin and higher gross weights resulting in the 9,000 to 30,000 pound gross weight aircraft, the S-55, S-56 and S-58.

The rescue capability of the S-55 and S-58 was demonstrated during the severe floods that occurred in the north eastern regions of the country in August 1955. The S-55 is shown below during a rescue mission in Union City Connecticut, where 75 people were rescued in just one neighborhood.



S-55

S-56

S-58

**The Navy and Marine Corps credited their helicopters with rescuing more than 730 lives in the flooded areas of Pennsylvania and Connecticut**



S-55 Rescue in Union City, Connecticut



Waterbury, Connecticut Flood



African Queen's Stern

**The African Queen Shipwreck**

On December 10, 1958 the steam powered large tanker ran aground and broke up off Ocean City, Maryland. Rough seas made it too hazardous for surface craft to attempt a rescue. The U.S. Coast Guard quickly coordinated a helicopter lift, and 13 Coast Guard, Marine and Navy helicopters rescued all of the 45 crew members. The ship went down in 30 feet of water, and the bow floated away sinking in 70 feet of water. The stern was eventually towed to shore, and the bow remains a diver's paradise.



Sikorsky pilot Frank Yirrel performing a rescue with an Army S-58 helicopter using a rubber tire on a sling, due to lack of an aircraft rescue sling



S-55 Rescue in Scranton, Pennsylvania Flood



African Queen's Bow



Wallace (Wally) Wessel

## Memories of a *Heroic Rescue*

The Sikorsky Historical Archives received a request from retired Col. Wallace (Wally) Wessel, USMC for assistance in obtaining a desktop model of an HRS-1 helicopter that he flew as pilot during a rescue mission in the Korean conflict in 1952.

During our search efforts to locate a source for the model, we were informed of a memorable rescue adventure that he successfully completed. He was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross for services set forth in the following award citation:

*For extraordinary achievement while participating in an aerial flight as pilot of a helicopter attached to Marine Helicopter Transport Squadron one sixty one on a voluntary rescue mission from the U.S.S. Valley Forge on 31 May 1952. Knowing the flight presented manifold dangers, a slim chance of successful rescue of three downed airman, First Lieutenant Wessel, accompanied by Captain Lesak, removed all possible gear from the helicopter, including parachutes and survival equipment, and proceeded to the rescue scene, a mountain ridge 6300 feet high, deep inside Communist North Korea. The downed airmen were members*

*of the crew of another helicopter that had been searching for a downed airman when it crashed. Alternately piloting the helicopter with Captain Lesak, making over six passes along the ridge in the rarefied atmosphere at precariously slow forward speed and in turbulent winds, loss of control was experienced and a crash narrowly averted twice before the three were rescued. Well knowing the terrific odds that faced him, he displayed an outstanding amount of courage. His conduct was an example of the highest order of heroism, and his devotion to duty reflects the highest credit upon himself and the United States Naval Service.*

The citation did not mention that the altitude and environmental conditions were beyond the take off performance capability for the aircraft. The rescues were performed at low airspeed with a rope ladder for one crew member boarding at a time with enemy fire in the area.



Wally is obtaining a model of his HRS-1 with the squadron number, colors and shield on the nose of the aircraft. Wally has approved the data presented on this page for publication.



Squadron Shield



HRS-1 on typical Korean mountain



Wally preparing for his mission



Wally in Korea



Operations in Korea

The Helicopter Rescue Award shown below was issued starting in January, 1950 to all individuals involved in rescue missions with Sikorsky helicopters.



Wally was one of the early recipients of the Rescue Award that was personally signed by Igor Sikorsky who was very proud of the heroes who flew these missions.



## 1960s



S-61



S-62



S-64



S-65

The Sikorsky helicopters up to the 1960s were limited in their performance by the piston engines available at the time. The development of the General Electric T-58, T-64 and Pratt & Whitney JFTD12A-5A shaft turbine engines provided higher power

available at lower engine weight, resulting in twin engine reliability and higher aircraft performance. The industry at this point expanded rapidly, and helicopters with gross weights between 22,000 and 50,000 pounds were developed. There are thousands

of worldwide rescue adventures that have occurred with these aircraft. The improved rescue capabilities with these larger cabin and increased gross weight was demonstrated during an amazing rescue called, "The Miracle of the Skagerrak".



S-61As during rescues from disabled ferry Skagerrak



S-61A approaching life raft during rescue operations



Royal Danish Air Force Rescue Crew Receives Rescue Awards from Sergei Sikorsky

## Daring Danish Rescue Foils Raging Sea

In early September, 1966, vacationers and business people were returning to Denmark from Norway via a ferry voyage across Skagerrak Strait. The Skagerrak was a sleek one year old ferry and was the namesake of the strait she crossed. She could make the 80 mile voyage in about five hours if wind and sea were right. The summer season was ending and there were ninety eight passengers and a crew of forty six on aboard.

The captain waited for the winds of the tropical storm Faith, born weeks before in the South Atlantic to subside, before giving the order to sail. The ferry was 37 miles into the voyage when the wind increased with explosive gusts, and there were black clouds and driving rain. The ferry suddenly shuddered and swung crazily off course. The hatches of the vehicle deck crumpled and thousands of tons of water poured into the lower regions of the ship. The ship was battered to death by the raging sea.

*...the captain and remaining crew were advised to abandon ship.*

The Royal Danish Sea Air Rescue Squadron 722 launched their S-61A helicopters and swept out over the North Sea rescuing 69 passengers from the storm tossed waters. Another 75 persons were rescued by two merchant ships, which were summoned by the air crews of the helicopters and guided to the disaster site. The five S-61As spent more than eight hours in the rescue operation, hampered by 50 knot winds and 40 foot waves. As darkness descended over the stricken ferry, the captain and remaining crew were advised to abandon ship. Nine crewmen boarded a life raft. The captain and first mate jumped into the sea, and they were all picked up by the S-61As. The ferry sank in 80 feet of water after drifting 17 miles.

At the subsequent debriefing, Air Force General Poul Ziegler noted that they had received the S-61As just the year before and said, "We had the right helicopter at the right time with the right personnel." In September of 1994 the Royal Danish Air Force observed its 10,000th rescue mission with the S-61A helicopters.

The Sikorsky helicopters produced during the **1970s to 2010** period benefited from technology improvements in rotors and blades, propulsion and drive systems, avionics and electronics, ride comfort, safety and reliability. As a result of the aircraft performance improvements, the level of rescues and lives saved increased in quantum leaps approaching three million worldwide. Examples of these rescues are as follows:

## Hong Kong Squadron Saves 34 off China



*S-76 works with a Royal Navy patrol boat in the search for survivors from a sunken barge.*

In August, 1991 Sikorsky S-76 helicopter crews of the Royal Hong Kong Auxiliary Air Force (RHKAAF) rescued 34 crew members after a barge capsized and sank in a typhoon off the coast of South China. In November, 1991 the S-76 helicopter crews of the RHKAA rescued 12 crew members of a sinking ship in strong winds and heavy seas 120 miles southwest of Hong Kong.

## Seahawk Humanitarian Mission in Somalia



In December, 1992 an SH-60B Seahawk from the USS Valley Forge provided rescue assistance to a large seagoing Dhow Chamsagar escaping from Somalia with 500 refugees, mostly women and children who were running out of supplies. Sea conditions precluded ship-to-ship transfer. The Seahawk delivered sufficient water, bread, rice, cereal, fruit, vegetables, and medical supplies for the Dhow to reach safety.

*Injured snowmobiler waves thanks to rescuer as he is hoisted into HH-60G Pave Hawk*

# 1970s



*Dangerous Glacier Crevasse*

## Pave Hawk Crew Save Snowmobilers from Alaskan Glacier Crevasse

On March 14, 1997 three snowmobilers were swallowed up by the crevasse's huge black mouth as their caravan followed a trail along the Nelchina Glacier 129 miles east of Anchorage. Other riders summoned help. Two HH-60G Pave Hawks from the Alaska Air National Guard arrived, but were unable to land on the unstable glacier. Crew members were lowered by rescue hoist into the crevasse to lift the injured men one at a time back to the aircraft's cabin. All three were flown to an Anchorage hospital.

## CH-53E Super Stallions Rescue More Than 900 People from Strife-Torn Sierra Leone



During the winter of 1997 a military coup against the civilian government created an urgent requirement to evacuate more than 330 Americans and citizens from more than 40 other countries. Children made up about a third of those airlifted. All were brought aboard the U.S.S. Kearsarge, an amphibious assault ship. The overthrow of the civilian government was accompanied by widespread looting and rioting. Advancing rebel forces also caused a deteriorating security condition that led to the evacuation.





Austrian Alps



Snow removal from roofs



House being cleared from snow



UH-60s in foreground and CH-53Gs in background at Innsbruck, Austria

## Helicopters Rescue Over 8,000 People During Austrian Alps Mountain Avalanches

As part of an international rescue force on February 24-25, 1999, over forty helicopters took part in the evacuation of over 8,000 stranded tourists. The ten UH-60s provided by the U.S. Army airlifted over 4000 people in two days. German Air Force

CH-53Gs were part of the evacuation force. The helicopters flew from Germany to the staging area in Innsbruck, Austria.

Seats in the Black Hawks were replaced with cargo straps parallel to the doors. 20 to 25 people were car-

ried per sortie. Operations occurred at 6,000 feet Mean Sea Level at 8 degrees C and max gross weight of 22,000 pounds. The Austrian Air Force selected the UH-60s for their primary transportation aircraft based on the performance of these rescue helicopters.



U.S. Coast Guard HH-60J Helicopters In Action During Hurricane Katrina Rescue Missions

## Sikorsky Helicopters Saved Over 35,000 Lives In The Hurricane Katrina Disaster

Hurricane Katrina arrived on August 28, 2005, and is considered to be one of the most destructive storms to strike the United States. These statistics are based on information received by Sikorsky from the various military entities and commercial customers who fly these aircraft. The following comment was made by an individual involved with the Hurricane Katrina rescues.



“It was amazing to see all the Sikorsky aircraft in action in New Orleans. I think that when Igor Sikorsky first envisioned his new invention, he intended it to be used in emergency situations like Katrina. There were hundreds of helicopters flying around and about 90 percent of them were Sikorsky. Your helicopters saved the day”...

*Major Rich Jethon*

## Sergei Sikorsky Awarded Life Time Membership in Helicopter Association International (HAI)

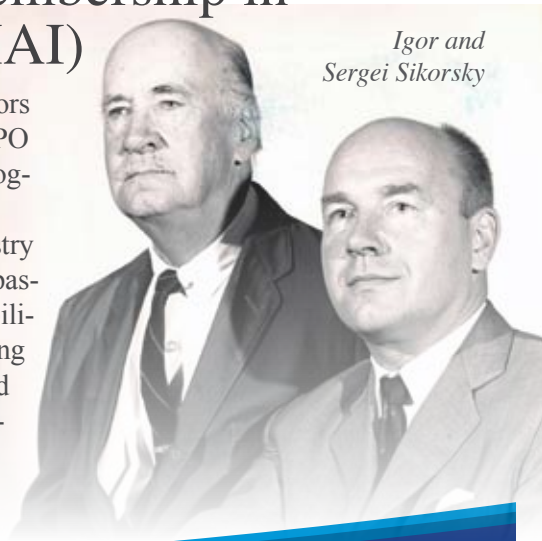


Igor Sikorsky testing hoist in R4



Sergei Sikorsky testing hoist in R4

On March 7, 2011 the HAI Board of Directors honored Sergei Sikorsky at the HELI-EXPO convention in Orlando, Florida. The award recognized Sergei for his lifetime contribution to the development of the worldwide helicopter industry that his father Igor Sikorsky created. Sergei's passion for developing the helicopter rescue capabilities is shown in the left photo, where he is testing the original hoist configuration being developed at the Floyd Bennett Naval Air Flight Test Center, Brooklyn, New York when he was a young Coast Guard airman during WW II.



Igor and Sergei Sikorsky

## Join *the* Sikorsky Archives

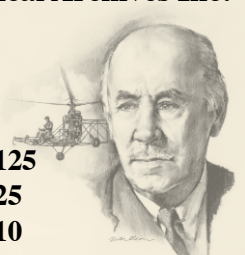
### Igor I. Sikorsky Historical Archives Inc.

MS S 578A  
6900 Main Street  
Stratford, CT 06615-9129

- Life Membership \$125
- 3 Year Membership \$25
- 1 Year Membership \$10

Please send a check or money order (do not send cash) payable to The Igor I. Sikorsky Historical Archives, Inc.

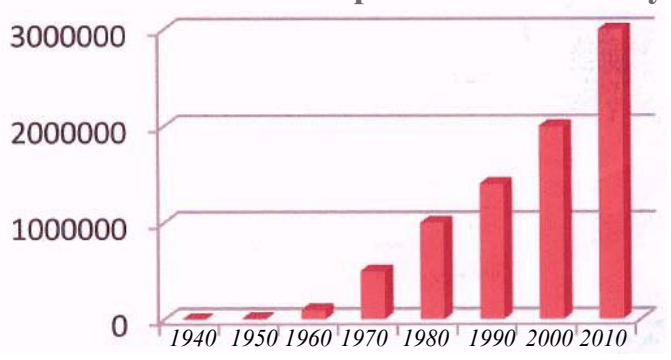
Name \_\_\_\_\_  
Address \_\_\_\_\_  
City \_\_\_\_\_  
State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_  
Phone Number(s) \_\_\_\_\_



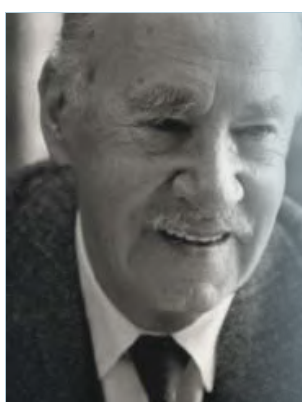
# From Dream To Reality

Lives Rescued

### Worldwide Helicopter Rescue History



Newsletter designed and edited by Lee Jacobson and Sikorsky Historical Archive members with graphic assistance by Edgar Guzman



“It would be right to say that the helicopter’s role in saving lives represents one of the most glorious pages in the history of human flight.”

*Igor Sikorsky*

