

COLD WAR DIPLOMACY BY COMPASSIONATE AND OUTSTANDING CARE PROVIDED BY THE US NAVY FOR AN INJURED SOVIET SAILOR

It was August 1991 and the cold war between the United States and the Soviet Union still raged on although the Soviet Union was disintegrating internally. It was a time of instability that could have had the only two super powers on the planet make a misstep that would plunge our world into a nuclear Armageddon that would end societies and life on Earth as we know of it today. This gloominess and dark time was also highlighted by our countries entry into the middle east trademarked by operation Desert Shield and then Desert Storm to counter the governance of a despotic dictatorship in Iraq that was backed by the Soviet Union. As one of two general surgeons and other medical support staff at USNH-Guam we had been trained and briefed and readied to be deployed at a moment notice to the Middle East in support of Desert Shield and Storm if necessary. During this time, it was somewhat disconcerting that we all had to be prepared for chemical, biologic and nuclear agents of war. This combination of warfare had never before been recorded in humanities long history of our stupid tendency to armed conflict. Despite this backdrop in life, everything seemed on the surface to be the calm beautiful Island paradise with blue skies and puffs of white clouds racing across the Island pushed by the trade winds reflection of an emerald blue surrounding ocean highlighted with small waves of whitecaps. Yet, there was this constant reminder that Guam was and currently is Americas tip of the spear in military projection of power in the Pacific as the old rusty deteriorating Soviet Union's pseudo-geologic trawlers plied the oceans around Guam to intercept secret radio transmissions and monitor U.S. nuclear submarine activity rather than do geology in the middle of the deepest ocean of the world.

Then by a single Morse code message asking for help was sent to the U.S. Coast Guard by one of the Soviet surveillance ships sailing around Guam. This message seeking help gave America a chance to extend kindness and friendship between two world super powers that had been at each other's throats since World War II. The event was initiated by the Soviet ship Morskoy Geolog doctor that was over 140NM of the coast of Guam when they sent an emergency Morse code message to the US Coast Guard early in the morning of June 30, 1991. The ship doctor was asking for help to save one of his ships sailors that was severely injured and was going to lose limb and or his life. The Morse coded message stated their sailor sustained a metal puncture wound to the thigh of his left leg that was spurting blood with no blood flow to the foot that was not able to be controlled by the ship doctor due to inadequate medical equipment on the ship. This message received by the Coast Guard Communication Station on Guam was then relayed to the U.S. Coast Guards Rescue Coordination Center that then requested assistance from U.S. Navy Helicopter Combat Squadron Five. The flight surgeon Lt. Nordyke of Helicopter Squadron Five relayed the information to U.S. Navy Hospital Guam and was put in contact with Navy hospital surgeon on duty Dr. Landström. Upon receipt of the information Dr. Landstrom recommended immediate of the Soviet sailor to U.S. Navy Hospital Guam for emergent treatment to save the sailors life and left leg due to an injury that had cut his femoral artery in the upper thigh causing his leg to swell causing severe pain. At this point everyone in the various commands agreed to bringing this injured Soviet sailor to Guam for surgical care, however there was a one big problem to overcome and that was that the Soviet ship was too far North for the Guam based HC-5 helos to reach. Knowing this the Soviet ship steamed at top speed South toward Saipan while the chopper took off from Guam and flew to Saipan to refuel. Then the chopper piloted by Commander Nick Paul and copiloted by Lt. Scott Hodges was able to launch from Saipan the same morning at about 9:00 am to intercept the Soviet "research" ship. This required navigational assistance from Navy air assets a P-3 from VP-40 Naval Air Station, Moffet Field, California flying overhead to maintain air traffic control. The chopper took about one hour and fifteen minutes to reach the Soviet ship and then the chopper hovered over the ship for about twenty minutes and lifted the patient and his doctor Ksromov George and supplies on to the chopper. The Chopper had to land again in Saipan to refuel again before proceeding to Navy Hospital Guam.

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The pilots of the chopper had to fly in poor weather conditions and to the very limits of their fuel capacity taking on great risk to their crew and craft for a voluntary humanitarian mission. Because of the poor weather conditions, the helo pilot stated that they would have not been able to locate the Soviet ship without the support of the Navy P-3 from California directing them to the ship. Upon arrival to Navy Hospital Guam the patient was taken to surgery on an emergent basis. This required emergent surgical fasciotomies of the leg, removal of a metallic shard retained in the common femoral artery and repair of the completely transected proximal common femoral artery in order to restore blood flow to the leg with evacuation of venous blood that was high in potassium to prevent cardiac arrest due to the prolonged period of time the leg did not have blood flow. In addition, this patient required intensive unit care for rhabdomyolysis and prevention of acute renal failure but eventually the patient was discharged back to his home with no problems and with preserved leg function. During this international event between the U.S. and the Soviet Union Chief data technician Wood's wife Sophia Wood born in Latvia and was the interpreter between Russian and English. Her voluntary service greatly assisted in the care of the Soviet Russian sailor and as soon as the patient was stabilized and taken to surgery, she obtained a special request by the Soviet doctor accompanying the patient. She relayed his special request to the Navy hospital emergency staff that he really wanted to have an American Coca Cola. Well, the Navy hospital staff not only gave the Russian doctor a can of Coke, but they gave him an entire six pack as he graciously received the gift with a big smile on his face between sips of the ice cold Coke. Upon discharge of the patient with his Russian doctor, Sophia told all the staff that the injured sailor was very grateful for his care and for the team effort that saved his life and his leg but could not restrain his appreciation of the soft American toilet paper available for his use. He stated that he would also never forget that soft American toilet paper since he was previously only familiar with the coarse uncomfortable Soviet made toilet paper.

This act of goodwill by the United States Coast Guard and Navy underscores how the American military can and has and continues to be a force of good in the world by that incredible effort and flawless execution of a complex hazardous logistical rescue that allowed this sailor's life and limb to be saved. It was a very small act of kindness that goes unrecognized and is drowned out by the larger darkness that has and still overhangs our species bent on self-annihilation. But, each small act of good deeds and acts of kindness the cruelty we impose on each other will be obscured into oblivion. Not long after this Soviet sailor's medical evacuation and care that save his life, the last President of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) President Mikhail Gorbachev resigned from office and handed over the launching codes for all of Soviet Union's nuclear missiles to the new Russian Federation President Boris Yeltsin on 25 December 1991. The following day on 26 December 1991 the USSR voted itself out of existence Supreme Soviet based on Declaration 142-H of the Belavezha Accords.

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