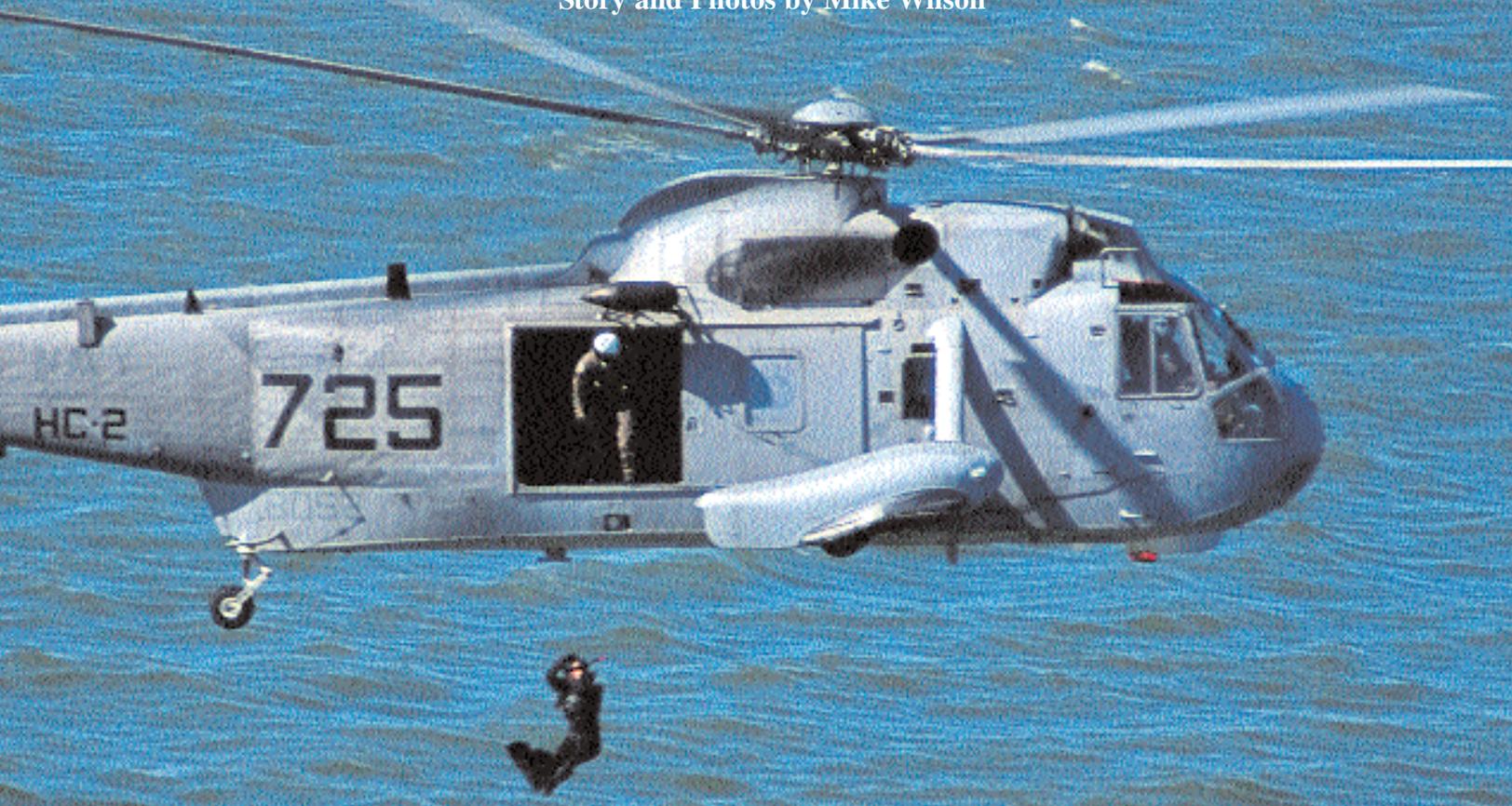


# FLEET ANGELS TO THE RESCUE

Story and Photos by Mike Wilson



**T**he sun is shining warm and bright, yet a young woman and her children shiver with fear in their home which is endangered by flood waters. Hovering overhead, a Navy helicopter lowers a rescue swimmer to evacuate the frightened family to safety. Amid the roar of the helicopter engines and rotor downwash, the rescue swimmer's cool professionalism

calms the frightened family as they are readied for hoisting up to the waiting helicopter.

This scenario did not take place on some Hollywood movie set or in a far-off country. It was one of 250 rescues conducted by the crews of two Helicopter Combat Support Squadron (HC) 2 helicopters flying six 10-hour days of search and rescue

An HC-2 SAR swimmer leaves the safety of his *Sea King* for the frigid waters off Norfolk, Va.

(SAR) missions in eastern North Carolina in September 1999 following Hurricanes Dennis and Floyd.

The Norfolk, Va.-based *Fleet Angels* fly the venerable UH-3H and VH-3A *Sea King*, and the oldest HC squadron shows no sign of slowing down with age. As the H-3 fleet readiness squadron, HC-2 guides student pilots and aircrews through SAR, familiarization, Naval Air Training and Operating Procedures Standardization and instrument check flights. In addition, the squadron is tasked with VIP flights, fleet logistics support for Commander Second Fleet, torpedo and drone recovery flights, and providing detachments to Commanders Fifth and Sixth Fleet in Manama, Bahrain, and Naples, Italy, respectively.

However hectic the squadron tempo, the men and women of HC-2 display the quiet confidence of professionals who know their jobs well and are proud to be a *Fleet Angel*. ✈

Mr. Wilson is a freelance aviation photographer and defense contractor.



AMS3 Fitzgerald watches *Mount Whitney* (LCC 20) slide by while in the pattern.

# HC-2 Rescue Enlists a Recruit

By Jack Dorsey



Photos by JO3 Heather Williams

Left, LCdr. Mike Smith administers the oath of enlistment to Derek Latham. Above, Latham's family and friends pose with the HC-2 crew in front of an H-3 *Sea King*.



It wasn't the Navy personnel in their flying machine, or the heroic rescue of his mother and two sisters that impressed 17-year-old Derek Latham. Nor was it the way the helicopter crew members risked their own lives to reach his family in Greenville, N.C., during the September 1999 floods that followed Hurricane Floyd. He figured that was just part of their jobs.

For Latham, then a senior at J. H. Rose High School who had never really thought about joining the Navy before, what sold him on the Navy was the crew's intelligence and calm response during chaotic times. "When the aircrewmembers came down, I noticed their professionalism," he remembered, which helped calm his mother and sisters despite the flooding that had nearly reached their home. "They were really shook up before, but when the crew landed, I saw the relief on their faces." That's what won over Latham.

The Navy flew those rescuers and two helicopters to his high school to officially administer the oath of enlistment to him. Latham joined the Navy to be a rescue swimmer like the ones who rescued his family. "That made up my mind," he said. "I wanted to join so that when I land and get out of the helo, people feel safe knowing that I will take care of them."

Aviation Structural Mechanic Third Class Kevin

Fitzgerald was one of the rescue swimmers who made an impression. Fitzgerald, rescue pilot Lieutenant Commander Mike Smith and HC-2 CO Commander Scott White accompanied the two H-3 *Sea Kings* that touched down on the high school athletic field, where Smith administered the oath.

Latham's new Navy status took an unusual route from the beginning. His mother, April Moore, works at the local community college. She told her boss, Dan Mayo, about the rescue and her son's interest in the Navy and the helicopter involved. Turned out, her boss is a lieutenant commander in the Naval Reserve and he flew the same type of helicopter on active duty. Not only that, he and LCdr. Smith were squadronmates.

Mayo called local Navy recruiter Chief John Urton, saying he had a possible recruit. Once the recruiter met Latham, he realized his enthusiasm was real. "He qualified in the physical exam and other respects, and can go into any field he wants. He's an outstanding young man—quiet, but very motivated," Urton said.

Thanks to the *Fleet Angels* of HC-2, in the recruiter's words, the Navy "snagged a good one."

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