USCG Rescues Two Men Adrift in Aleutians

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Anne Hillman/KUCB

Two men spent 52 hours drifting in the Bering Sea before being rescued by the Coast Guard on Sunday evening. Fifty-year-old Rod Whitehead of Adak and 35-year-old Bill Osterback of Sand Point hit a rock with the motor of their 15-foot hard-bottomed Zodiac inflatable near Amatignak Island, about 130 miles southwest of Adak. The boat they launched their Zodiac from, the Larissa M, was anchored in a cove nearby.

They were hired by a group of surveyors working on remote islands documenting old Aleut village sites. Whitehead says the Zodiac lost power and the strong current pulled them away from the island at about 3 p.m. on Friday.

Rescue - 1a ".on the rocks." 15 s

The four surveyors who chartered the boat were still on Amatignak Island. Whitehead said they used their low-power radio to contact the surveyors. No one was on the Larissa M.

Rescue - 2 ".Coast Guard to come." 10 s

The surveyors gathered together old nets, buoys, and boards from around the small island to build a make-shift raft and oars and get to the boat and the VHF radio. It took them until almost 10 p.m. the next day. In the meantime, the two men tried to paddle to shore.

Rescue - 3 ".by that point." 13 s

They finally realized that they wouldn't be able to get the 15-hundred pound Zodiac to shore so they tried sleeping in the boat despite the waves. The chances of running into another boat in the Amchitka Pass were very slim, so they rationed their food.

Rescue - 4 ".did the same." 16 s

Though the weather was cold enough to see their breath and they were soaked with water, Whitehead said they stayed positive.

Rescue - 4b ".we didn't." 10 s

On Sunday morning, they could hear planes circling above them. When the weather cleared that afternoon, they waved anything they could in the air until the Coast Guard C-130 aircraft found them and dropped them supplies, like a better radio, survival suits and food.

Rescue - 5 ".when we received that." 3 s

By 8 p.m. Sunday evening a Coast Guard helicopter arrived at the scene and hoisted the two men to safety. The fishing vessel Heritage headed from Adak to the Larissa M with a pilot to drive the boat and the four surveyors back to Adak.

Both Whitehead and Osterbeck were treated for dehydration at the Adak Clinic then released. Whitehead said both of his feet were numb but are feeling better.

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