Air Station Kodiak Crews Make Long-Range Rescue

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Annie Ropeik/KUCB

The Coast Guard sent three aircraft on a long-range rescue for a mariner aboard a container ship near Unalaska yesterday (Monday).

The 751-foot bulk carrier TW Manila first called for help late Sunday night. They reported a 28-year-old crewmember was suffering from appendicitis-like symptoms on board.

The ship was 450 miles south of Unalaska at the time. That’s too far out to sea for a helicopter to safely conduct a hoist, says Coast Guard public affairs officer Jonathan Klingenberg.

“They have to get within 125 nautical miles in order so the helicopters can get out there with the fuel that they have, pick up the individual and get him back safely. Any further than that, they risk fuel consumption.”

He says the Coast Guard told the Manila to steer closer to Unalaska. Then, the Coast Guard deployed a Jayhawk helicopter and Hercules airplane from Air Station Kodiak. They also called in a Dolphin helicopter from the Seattle-based Coast Guard Cutter Midgett, which was on patrol nearby.

Klingenberg says the extra aircraft provide back-up for the medevac and support for each other during a rescue so far from land.

“These long-range medevacs illustrate our crews’ abilities to coordinate a highly complicated medevac such as this. It takes a lot of planning with not only our cutters but also our air crews and the vessel that the patient needs to be rescued from in order to get them within range for us to get out there and safely get him back to the medical care that he needs.”

The aircraft met the Manila 125 miles south of Unalaska early yesterday (MONDAY) morning. Klingenberg says there were 15- to 20-foot seas and winds up to 40 mph at the time.

The Jayhawk crew hoisted the mariner off the ship and took him back to Unalaska. He was transferred to a Guardian med-flight for further care.