

# CHOPPER RESCUE

George D. Ellis. Ph.D.

Dear Editor

Subject: Submarine Saves Helicopter

Reference: Photo of HS-51 being piggy-backed safely to port by USS Corporal [SS 346] featured in American Submariner, issue 1/2009, page 16.

This narrative presents a decent broad-brush account of the incident which fortunately came off without a hitch. The lack of any guidelines regarding how to actually land a distressed helicopter onboard a U.S. Navy fleet boat, notwithstanding, The following thoughts and recollections provide amplification:

"EMERGENCY SURFACE... blow all main ballast" followed by, "Engineer to the bridge" [that would be me] over the 1-MC. The chief radio operator had just intercepted a "MAY-DAY" call from the helicopter with which Corporal had been operating in the Key West op areas. The boat's skipper, LCDR. E. O. Proctor, then briefs the engineer officer [EO], LTJG. George



**(SSHLP) One of a kind. The USS Corporal, an SS Helo Landing Platform. Not many of those around anymore! Couldn't dive since the Chopper was not equipped with a Klaxon..**

D. Ellis, concerning the plight of HS-51.

The helicopter pilot had communicated to the Corporal CO that the bird could remain airborne for only a few more minutes and would Corporal stand by to pick up survivors. Then, from CO SS-346, "Roger...but, how about attempting an on-deck landing?" An instant reply, "Hell yes, let's give it a go!"

Corporal immediately bent on all engines and raced toward the chopper.

At that point, the volunteer on-deck recovery party, headed by the COB, commenced to rig the after deck for a helo landing despite the danger from the whirling blades and hot engine exhaust.

Here again without the benefit of instructions or precedence, the long wire antennae was taken down and mooring lines broken out on deck.

And now, the dangerous part... The after deck was cleared of the recovery team except for Engineering Officer Ellis who straddled the after edge of the sail so as to act as the landing signal officer [LSO] for the helo's pilot.

Using a combination of hand, foot and head signals, the LSO guided the helicopter over the submarine's deck, at which time the pilot made a perfect three point mooring with a mere three inches to spare on either side of the chopper's front landing gear.

The deck party secured the helo. Corporal set a course for the barn.  
QED

Number 1



THIS IS TO CERTIFY THAT

**LTJG G.D. ELLIS JR., U.S.N.**

is fully qualified to wave or signal by use of hands, eyebrows or torso to distraught or distressed whirly bird pilots making scheduled or emergency landings in helicopters aboard submarine type aircraft carriers. Initially qualified aboard USS CORPORAL (SS CV 346) on 26 April 1956 30 miles south of Key West, Florida.

AUTHENTICATED

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*To George:  
Shirley Ellis*