

*From: A Coast Guardsman's story of experiencing the death of
TWA Flight 800 By Shawn Vredenburg*

...I heard the CO on the ship's intercom reporting we would be coming up to full speed for a plane crash **fifteen miles away**.

As I felt the ADAK come up to her maximum speed of 30 knots..

As we were making these preparations, a circling navy helicopter reported a liferaft. The crew was pumped, primed for action. We were ready to do anything to save those people.

...As we approached the position of the liferaft, it was dark from the sunset and the smoke of the huge fires. Half the horizon was fire. It surreal, like something you could only imagine seeing on television. Huge tongues of flame reaching for the sky. The smell

of aviation fuel and the acrid smoke from the fires, combined with the diesel exhaust from our paxman engines, made the air harsh to breathe. We saw the liferaft off of the port bow and headed for it. As we got closer, I was horrified at the sight. It was not a liferaft from a small airplane; it was an escape chute from a large airliner. This was not going to be a small SAR for a couple of people in a plane; this was a big airliner carrying hundreds of people.

There, right next to the escape chute, was the first victim. A man stripped to his underwear, face down in the water. We lowered the RHIB into the water to recover him. BM2 Jeff Ruggieri and Seaman Duane Anderson were the first crew. I was on the bow of the ADAK, directing Jeff where to go to find this victim. Jeff pulled the RHIB alongside and helped Duane pull him aboard. I could see Jeff and Duane begin to pull, but then stop and let the victim slide back into the water. It is a very difficult thing, emotionally, to be in such a small boat (15 ft long) with a dead person, and I thought this is what Jeff and Duane were going through. I yelled to Jeff to do his job and get that guy on board. Jeff yelled back that he couldn't, he didn't have a head. We left him to search for any possible survivors.

Soon we came to a huge debris field. There were literally millions of pieces of debris everywhere. Most pieces were unrecognizable, but I could tell what some of the larger pieces were. **A piece of the tail section, a row of red seats**, and a section of the overhead baggage compartment. And wherever I looked I saw the honeycombed pieces of bulkhead.

And there were bodies. In this debris field there were bodies, and parts of bodies, everywhere. Some still had their clothes on, but most had some or all of their clothes ripped off. Many were

horribly burned or torn apart. This is when it began to hit me that there was little chance of any survivors. Jeff, in the RHIB, came into the same debris field, alongside the ADAK, and began recovering bodies.

Note this report has the Adak at least 15 miles away not 5.4 miles and talks about finding a piece of the tail section and red seats.