

Russian Rescue at Sea March 1960

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Helicopter Squadron Six (HS-6) was unusually active in sea rescues during its six month deployment aboard the USS Kearsarge in 1959-60. The ship left San Diego, California on September, 5, 1959. And by the time it returned to the US on September 18, 1961 the Kearsarge and HS-6 had participated in three rescue operations saving lives in each instance.



Above are two images of the Russian sailors in San Francisco just prior to their return home to Russia after being lost at sea for 49 days. They had lost much of their weight during that time and resorted to eating their leather belts.

Fortunately they were rescued by an HS-6 helicopter crew from the USS Kearsarge during its 1959-1960 deployment in the West Pacific Ocean. The brave Russian sailors were rescued on March 7, 1960 about 1,200 miles from Wake Island.¹

This event took place as reported below.

49-days long drift in the Pacific

“On January 17, 1960, the man-of-war's crew of four was preparing the barge for loading on the Kuril Islands, when they encountered heavy weather. The tackle was torn and the crew, junior sergeant Askhat Ziganshin (Russian: Асхат Рахимзянович Зиганшин, Tatar Cyrillic: Әсхәт Рәхимжан улы Жиһаншин, Latin: Äsxät Răximcan ulı Sihanşin), and crewmen Filipp Poplavsky (Russian: Филипп Григорьевич Поплавский), Anatoly Kryuchkovsky (Russian: Анатолий Фёдорович Крючковский), and Ivan Fedotov (Russian: Иван Ефимович Федотов), drifted for 49 days until the U.S. aircraft carrier Kearsarge picked up them on 7 March in stormy waters 1,200 miles off Wake Island.

There was not enough food on the barge: one loaf of bread and a bucket of potatoes, sodden in black oil. As they drifted in the area, where the Soviet missiles were tested and navigation was forbidden, no ship found them until the Americans did. The crew also ate their leather belts, wristlets and finally boots to prolong their food reserves. The drift of Askhat "Victor" Ziganshin's crew took a resonance in the worldwide press. Returning to the USSR, the crew had popularity close to the popularity of cosmonauts, and took a major role in Soviet pop-culture.” <[Source](#)>

One of the HS-6 squadron chief petty officers P. Keznetzoff (see image on right) spoke Russian and thus likely was on one of the rescue helicopters--number 10.

Unfortunately, as of October, 2016, only two of the four rescued Russians are currently alive and one of them is named Askhat Ziganshin.

The other two HS-6 rescues (Nagoya and Midway) are identified in the Resources below.



¹ Source for the Russian images is: <http://www.gettyimages.com/detail/video/four-rescued-and-suited-russian-sailors-enjoy-san-news-footage/139507890> See this file on the Internet: <http://www.2-sir.com/TwinFalls/Russian-Rescue-at-Sea.pdf>

Alphabetical, Annotated, and Hyperlinked Resources

- Disaster at Nagoya: A firsthand account of that terrible typhoon that struck Japan and the rescue missions by HS-6 personnel which saved countless lives. <http://www.2-sir.com/TwinFalls/Ise-Wan.html>
- Drift barge T-36 — a feat of four Soviet guys: A very detailed account of the men and their ordeal with stunning maps, pictures, and hyperlinks not found elsewhere: <http://survinat.com/2014/04/drift-barge-t-36-a-feat-of-four-soviet-guys/>
- Midway Rescue at Sea: Another firsthand account of the rescue by HS-6 personnel on 26 January, 1960. Weather conditions were severe and exceptionally hazardous. <http://www.2-sir.com/TwinFalls/Midway.html>
- Movie: Forty Nine Days or 49 Dney: A synopsis of the 1964 movie with cast of characters: <http://www.afi.com/members/catalog/DetailView.aspx?s=1&Movie=20889>
- Naval History and Heritage Command: USS Kearsarge Rescues Four Soviet Soldiers Adrift in Pacific Ocean for 49 Days. A useful account of the rescue mission mentioning the Russian personnel names. <https://www.history.navy.mil/research/library/online-reading-room/title-list-alphabetically/u/uss-kearsarge-rescues-soviet-soldiers-1960.html>
- On This Day: January 17: A recap of the ordeal and subsequent events. Notably, this “extraordinary event helped to crack open the Iron Curtain. The Soviet people saw that the people of USA were not monsters, and people in the US were amazed by the courage and patriotism of four Soviet soldiers.” <http://russiapedia.rt.com/on-this-day/january-17/>
- Overwow: Forty-nine days in the open ocean: People and ocean. Too many pop-up ads, but good discussion and pictures: <http://overwow.org/english/travel-2/four-in-the-sea-02.php>
- Reunion Announcement for Russian Rescue Personnel in 2007: <http://www.military.com/HomePage/UnitPageBulletinBoard/1,13492,200222%7C902130%7CM,00.html>
- Seamen ate soap and fried boots: Still another Russian account with cultural and political comment: <http://rusnewsjournal.com/1/724051/>
- Self-propelled barge T-36: Wiki: The Wiki account that includes the children’s rhyme in pop-Russian culture. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Self-propelled_barge_T-36
- The Four Courageous: A 1960 film about the four Russians who spent 49 days at sea: <https://www.net-film.ru/en/film-5418/>
- USS Kearsarge (CVS-33): Brief history and overview of the third Kearsarge: <http://www.uscarriers.net/cv33history.htm> . The 1959-60 Cruise Book is located here: <http://www.navysite.de/cruisebooks/cv33-59/index.html>
- USS Kearsarge: Ship Details Overview, and nice photos: <http://www.navysite.de/cv/cv33.htm>
- Video for Sale: Thirty-nine seconds of video for sale about rescued Russian sailors before returning to Russia: http://www.buyoutfootage.com/pages/titles/pd_nr_446c.html#bottom_synopsis The video is also available from Getty: <http://www.gettyimages.com/detail/video/four-rescued-and-suited-russian-sailors-enjoy-san-news-footage/139507890>
- Vladimir Pelevin Blog: Another Russian account with additional details: <http://vladimir-pelevin.blogspot.com/2010/03/uss-kearsarge-rescues-four-soviet.html>