

35 Miles From Shore

A true story

by

Emilio Corsetti III

Adapted from the book *35 Miles From Shore: the Ditching and
Rescue of ALM Flight 980*

by

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INT./EXT. SH-3A HELICOPTER OVER THE CARIBBEAN SEA - DAY

SUPER - MAY 2, 1970

A Navy SH-3A helicopter flies low over a turbulent sea. Huge swells rise and fall in all directions.

COCKPIT

The two pilots are LT. COMMANDER JAMES RYLEE and LT. DONALD HARTMAN.

HARTMAN

(filtered)

Coast Guard 7245 this is Saltspray
15, how do you read? Coast Guard
7245 this is Saltspray 15, how do
you read?

There is no response, but the faint SOUND of a MORSE CODE IDENT can be heard over the radio.

RYLEE

(filtered)

I'm hearing an ident.

HARTMAN

(filtered)

Yeah, me too.

RYLEE

(filtered)

The Coast Guard must have dropped
a beacon.

CABIN

In the back of the helicopter two crewmen, Crew Chief CV LINDLEY and Chief Aviation Machinist's Mate WILLIAM BRAZZELL, rig up a rescue seat to the hoist system in preparation for hoisting survivors into the helicopter.

They are wearing flight suits and helmets with umbilical cords that are connected to the helicopter's intercom communications system (ICS).

LINDLEY

(over the ICS)

All set back here.

RYLEE

(over the ICS)

Okay, standby. We're coming up on the crash scene.

Survivors in life vests are spread out in an area about the size of a football field.

There is lots of debris floating in the water: luggage, toilet paper, seat cushions, articles of clothing, small metal pieces, and unidentifiable honeycomb material.

There are two bodies floating face down. There is one large group of survivors huddled around what looks like a life raft.

LINDLEY'S POV - Lindley opens the side door of the helicopter and leans out to survey the scene. He spots a lone individual in a large life raft.

LINDLEY

(over the ICS)

I got someone right below us.

RYLEE

(over the ICS)

Okay, we'll start with him.

(beat)

Listen up. There are a lot of people out here. I wanna get as many as we can hold.

INT. ONA HEADQUARTERS - DAY

SUPER - SIX MONTHS EARLIER

Overseas National Airways (ONA) President and CEO STEEDMAN HINCKLEY (38) sticks his head out of his office and addresses a SECRETARY sitting nearby. Steedman is young, handsome, and sports a short haircut.

STEEDMAN

Is Balsey back yet?

SECRETARY

He's still flying.

STEEDMAN

Call down to dispatch and tell them I want to see him as soon as he gets in.

Balsey enters the room seconds later. Balsey (37) is not your stereotypical airline pilot. He's short, overweight, and speaks with a deep voice that sounds like he's perpetually speaking through an aircraft PA system.

Steedman signals for him. Steedman's tiny office is adorned with a world map and several aircraft models with the ONA paint scheme sitting on his desk.

STEEDMAN

How'd the training flight go?

BALSEY

I've had better.

(beat)

Whose bright idea was it to hire a bunch of kids with no jet time?

STEEDMAN

And where exactly do you expect them to get this jet time? Even you at some point in your illustrious career had no jet time.

BALSEY

That might be true, but at least I knew how to shoot a damn NDB approach.

STEEDMAN

Well, that's why I hired you. So you can teach them.

Steedman takes a seat behind his desk.

STEEDMAN

Have you had a chance to look over the St. Maarten route?

BALSEY

Yeah.

STEEDMAN

And.

BALSEY

It's doable. But there are problems.

STEEDMAN

I'm listening.

BALSEY

Okay, let's start with the runway. It's only 5200 feet long and it has water at both ends. The only instrument approach is an NDB to runway 9. Then there's the mountain range just east of the airport. The biggest problem, though, is that it's at the outer range for the DC-9. Headwinds in either direction and you can't make it with any kind of reserves.

Steedman walks to the world map. He runs his finger down the map until stopping on the island of Bermuda.

STEEDMAN

Bermuda.

Steedman moves down the map and points to the general location of where St. Marten is located in the Caribbean.

STEEDMAN

It's almost at the halfway point between New York and St. Maarten. If fuel becomes an issue, we land there. But I have an even better solution.

Steedman returns to his desk and removes a paper from a file folder.

STEEDMAN

I put in an order for an extra fuel tank.

Steedman looks over the paper.

STEEDMAN

The tank holds an extra... 780 gallons of fuel.

He hands the paper to Balsey who looks it over with a hint of skepticism.

BALSEY

(rubbing his chin)

That should be more than enough fuel. There's still a weight problem, though. No way can you take off on that runway with full fuel and a full load of passengers.

STEEDMAN

I know. We're looking at flying to San Juan if the loads are high. They have longer runways.

BALSEY

And this will be operated as an ALM flight?

STEEDMAN

We provide the plane and flight crew; ALM provides the cabin crew.

BALSEY

How soon before you start?

STEEDMAN

January. I'm flying down to Curaçao next week.

EXT. CURAÇAO INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT - DAY

SUPER CURAÇAO INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT

Steedman and another man, Assistant Chief Pilot ED VERONELLI (34), good looking with big sideburns, are being escorted by a man in a white suit.

They walk along the tarmac in front of an open aircraft hangar. The man in the white suit is ALM President CIRO OCTAVIO (TAWA) IRAUSQUIN. An ALM F-27 taxis nearby.

TAWA

(gesturing)

This is where we do the majority of our routine maintenance. Heavy maintenance we have to contract out.

They continue walking as the ALM F-27 taxis by. It's noisy and the prop blast picks up the dust from the ramp and sends it blowing in the direction of the three men. Tawa hurries them into an office building.

INT. TAWA'S OFFICE ALM HEADQUARTERS - DAY

Tawa offers Steedman and Ed seats in front of his desk.

TAWA

I have to tell you, Steedman. I've looked over your proposal and I have to say I'm a little concerned about using the DC-9. I was thinking a 727 would be a better aircraft. Or what about the DC-8?

ED VERONELLI

Runway's too short for the DC-8.

STEEDMAN

And it's tied up anyway. We've looked at this very closely and we're confident that the DC-9 can do the job.

TAWA

But don't you think the plane is a bit small for such a long flight?

STEEDMAN

We use the nine on our New York to Las Vegas flights. It's about the same stage length as what we're looking at here.

TAWA

Perhaps you're right. Give me a few days. I should have an answer for you by next week.

Steedman and Ed get up from their seats.

TAWA

I hope you both can join me for dinner tonight.

ED VERONELLI

Thanks, but I'm taking the early flight out tomorrow.

TAWA

(to Steedman)

And what about you and your lovely wife?

STEEDMAN

I'll be flying out to St. Maarten tomorrow. Thought I'd take a look at the airport. But we're free tonight. I'm sure Ingrid would have no objections.

TAWA

Very good, then.

Tawa walks around his desk to bid the two men farewell.

INT. CURAÇAO TELEVISION STUDIO - DAY

ROBBY SCHOUTEN (late 20s), tall, thin, curly hair, a television producer and on air personality, is interviewing a guest. The interview is in Papiamentu, the local language of the Netherlands Antilles.

The guest is a male singer in his thirties. His band is behind him. When the interview is completed, Robby exits the stage where he is greeted by his fiancé MARGARETH ABRAHAM (24). Margareth is short in stature, but very attractive with shoulder-length, auburn hair.

Margareth is still dressed in her ALM stewardess uniform. They embrace. The singer and his band can be heard in the background. Their conversation is in Papiamentu with subtitles.

ROBBY

How was your flight?

MARGARETH

Fine. A couple of screaming babies, but other than that it was fine. I have to talk to you about tomorrow, though. Zahira asked me if I would fly for her.

ROBBY

But what about St. Barts? I already made hotel reservations.

MARGARETH

I know. But she flew for me last month. And I don't have too many months left to pay her back.

Robby releases Margareth from his grasp. His disappointment is etched on his face. He lights a cigarette.

ROBBY

I don't know why you're still working for that airline. You should be here with me.

MARGARETH

Yes, I know. I promise I'll give my notice in a month or two.

Margareth places her hand on Robby's shoulder. She leans over and whispers in his ears.

MARGARETH

I'm free tonight.

Robby faces Margareth and kisses her.

ROBBY

Promise me you won't change out of your uniform.

Margareth punches him and pulls away in mock embarrassment. A STAGE HAND interrupts.

STAGE HAND

Two minutes, Robby.

The stage hand acknowledges Margareth.

STAGE HAND

Margareth, congratulations on your engagement.

He looks at Robby.

STAGE HAND

Maybe now he'll start treating us better.

ROBBY

We're not married yet. You can still be replaced, you know.

STAGE HAND

Where are you going to find
someone else to put up with you?

INT. TAWA IRAUSQUIN'S RESIDENCE - DUSK

A television is on in an empty room. The band on Robby's television show is just finishing up as Robby walks on the stage.

EXT. THE PATIO OF TAWA IRAUSQUIN'S RESIDENCE - DUSK

Tawa and Steedman enjoy a beautiful sunset. They have a perfect view of the Caribbean Sea. Two glasses of wine sit on a table between the two men.

TAWA

So, Steedman. Tell me. How are things in New York?

STEEDMAN

You mean with the airline?

TAWA

Yes.

STEEDMAN

Well, where should I start? Competition is killing us. United just about put us under going after our Hawaii route. Labor costs are high. Our fuel costs have gone through the roof. Still, there's nothing I'd rather be doing.

TAWA

I know what you mean. There is a certain allure to this business, no? I understand you are a pilot.

Steedman's wife INGRID joins the two on the patio. She is dressed in a flowing sun dress. A slight breeze makes the dress cling to her, revealing a shapely figure. She is noticeably younger than Steedman. She drapes her arms around her husband.

INGRID

He was the youngest pilot at his base to make aircraft commander.

STEEDMAN

That was a long time ago. I fly just enough now to stay current. You are a pilot, also, I hear.

TAWA

I flew for a short time with KLM. It's been a while since I sat behind the controls of an aircraft. I wouldn't know how to start one up these days.

Tawa grabs a chair and offers it to Ingrid who graciously accepts.

TAWA

(to Ingrid)

Steedman tells me that you are a former stewardess.

INGRID

For a short time. That is until Steedman swept me off my feet.

INT. FARM HOUSE FAMILY ROOM - DAY

It's Thanksgiving and the house is full of people. Small children are running through the house. Dinner has ended and Balsey and his wife EDITH are approached by BALSEY'S MOTHER. Edith is on the petite side. She has short, light blond hair and a pretty face.

BALSEY'S MOTHER

Edith, can I get you some more peach cobbler?

EDITH

No. Thank you. Everything was delicious. Are you sure I can't help with the dishes?

BALSEY'S MOTHER

I'm sure.

BALSEY

Hey, what about me? I could go for some more peach cobbler?

Balsey's mother looks her son up and down.

BALSEY'S MOTHER

Maybe you should stay away from
the cobbler.

BALSEY

What? So I've gained a few pounds.

A SMALL CHILD, a girl age four, walks up to Balsey and tugs
his pant leg.

SMALL CHILD

Uncle Balsey, my dad says that you
fly airplanes. Is that true?

Balsey glances over at his brother who is sitting on a
couch smiling back at him.

BALSEY

That's right, sweetie. Would you
like to come fly with me some
time? See what it looks like above
the clouds?

SMALL CHILD

I'd be too scared.

BALSEY

There's nothing to be scared
about. You'd like it. Besides, I
would never let anything happen to
someone as cute as you. Maybe next
summer when you come to visit
we'll go flying. Then you can tell
all your friends.

The little girl ponders the offer.

SMALL CHILD

I'd have to ask my dad first.

She turns and runs excitedly back to her dad to give him
the good news. Balsey turns and faces Edith. He takes her
by the hand.

BALSEY

Come with me. I want to show you
something.

EDITH

Show me what?

BALSEY

Just grab your coat. You'll see.

EXT. WOODED AREA - DAY

Balsey and Edith walk hand in hand through a densely wooded area. A light blanket of snow covers the ground and clings to the bare branches.

Balsey visually inspects the trunks of a few nearby trees until finding one with a red X painted on the bark.

BASLSEY

This is the spot.

Edith glances around. She is wearing a Parka over her dress. She wobbles as her high heels sink into the snow. She looks over at her husband with a bemused stare.

BALSEY

Okay, now look down and tell me what you see.

Edith looks down.

EDITH

I see mud on my brand new shoes.

BALSEY

You're looking at the site of our future home.

EDITH

What?

BALSEY

You're standing in our living room. It might not be for a while. Maybe not until I retire. But this whole area here from that rock over there down to that fallen tree is ours. These trees -- they belong to us.

Edith surveys the area with a new perspective. She snuggles up to her husband.

EDITH

It's perfect. I couldn't have picked a better spot.

INT. ONA HEADQUARTERS BILL BAILEY'S OFFICE - DAY

Executive Vice President BILL BAILEY sits behind his desk as Steedman enters the office. A name plate reveals his name and position.

STEEDMAN

I have a problem I need to talk to you about.

BAILEY

Let me guess. It has to do with St. Maarten.

STEEDMAN

Salkind is insisting that we carry a navigator on the flights.

BAILEY

A navigator? And where is a navigator supposed to sit in a DC-9?

STEEDMAN

The jump seat.

BAILEY

And do what? Babysit the pilots?

STEEDMAN

I know. I've already talked to Wagenfeld. He said there's nothing we can do about it. It's in the navigator's contract.

BAILEY

It's more union bullcrap. That's what it is.

STEEDMAN

We also have a problem with the auxiliary fuel tank? Douglas Aircraft can't get us the tank before March. Not a whole lot we can do about it. I've already talked to Tawa Irausquin at ALM. He's willing to delay the tank installation until April first.

BAILEY

Are you sure we even want to do this St. Maarten thing? It's been nothing but headaches from the start.

Steedman walks to a large glass window. In the background a TWA 707 departs JFK airport.

STEEDMAN

It's a stepping stone. In five years the Caribbean is going to be our biggest market. People want to escape. They want to go to exotic destinations. Trust me. Our future lies in the Caribbean.

INT. BAR DOWNTOWN MANHATTAN - NIGHT

It's late and there are only a handful of patrons sitting around the bar. Cheap Christmas decorations adorn the room.

At the end of the bar sits a MAN with a military style hair cut. He sits alone, nursing a bottle of beer. He is watching the news on a small black and white television mounted above the bar.

The story on the news concerns a group of war protesters on a college campus.

The bartender, GENE GREMMELSBACKER (28), notices the man watching the news story. He opens a bottle of beer and sets it in front of the man.

GENE

This one's on the house.

Gene glances up at the television.

GENE

Not exactly the hero's welcome you were expecting, huh?

MAN

No. But I don't blame them. They got it mostly right.

The man examines the bartender. Gene has long, dark hair and a scruffy beard.

MAN

How'd you know I was military?

GENE

I'm an ex-marine myself. Got out about a year ago. I guess it takes one to know one.

MAN

See any action?

GENE

Spent the entire time stateside. Played the trumpet in a Marine jazz band. Turns out they don't have much need for trumpet players in 'nam.

A friend of Gene's, RICK ARNOLD (24), enters the bar. Rick is sporting a beard also. His hair is long and curly. He drapes his coat over a nearby bar stool and takes a seat.

RICK

Whadda you got that will warm me up?

GENE

Think I had it easy. See this guy here. Guess where he spent his four years?

Rick looks at Gene and then at the man sitting next to him.

GENE

You're looking at a former honor guard at Arlington Cemetery.

RICK

Never know it by looking at me, huh? You wait. Six months from now and you'll look just like us.

MAN

You both look like fine and respectable young men to me.

The man downs the beer that Gene had given him.

MAN

It was a pleasure meeting both of you. I guess I should have learned

to play an instrument like my
mother always wanted.

He takes a ten from his wallet and leaves it on the bar. He
grabs his coat and heads for the door.

MAN

Thanks for the beer.

After the man leaves, Gene pours Rick a cup of coffee,
adding a little liquor before handing him the cup.

GENE

Here, this will warm you up.

Gene cleans up the bar and drapes a towel over his
shoulder. He takes the ten and goes to the cash register,
putting five dollars in the tip jar.

GENE

You remember Jean Claude?

RICK

The guy from the World Health
Organization?

GENE

Yeah. He stopped by earlier today.
Somehow the subject came up that I
had gotten married over the summer
but hadn't gone anywhere for our
honeymoon. He travels a lot so he
had a few suggestions of where I
might want to go. He mentioned the
Caribbean. He went on and on about
how nice it is down there.
Pristine beaches. Emerald green
waters. Then he offers me to stay
rent free in some villa he owns on
some island.

RICK

A villa?

GENE

Yeah. I already talked to Loretta.
We're going the first week of May.

RICK

No kidding? I've never been to the
Caribbean.

GENE

Why don't you come with us?

RICK

What? Are you crazy? On your honeymoon?

GENE

It's not really a honeymoon. It's a vacation. This place has four bedrooms. Loretta already invited her sister. And my sister Ellen is coming too.

Rick reaches into his coat pocket and pulls out a black leather scheduler. The name Century 21 is embossed in gold on the cover. He opens the scheduler and begins thumbing through the calendar.

A CLOSE UP on the scheduler reveals that there are only one or two appointments for December and January and nothing after that.

RICK

I might be able to squeeze in a few days. I could use a couple of days of R & R.

EXT. ON THE FLIGHT DECK OF THE USS GUADALCANAL ANCHORED AT MOREHEAD CITY, NORTH CAROLINA - DAY

SUPER - USS GUADALCANAL JANUARY 13, 1970 MOREHEAD CITY, NORTH CAROLINA

Rows of CH-46 helicopters are parked on the deck. Their blades are tied down. Sailors and marines in winter clothing board the ship carrying duffel bags.

INT. BUNK ROOM OF THE USS GUADALCANAL - DAY

The bunk room is crowded as marines stake out their bunks and start unpacking their personal belongings. The bunk beds, stacked three high, hang from chains attached to the ceiling.

One marine, JOHN BARBER (21), starts to unpack. He is approached by another marine, BILL SCHRADER (20). Both men are solidly built.

BILL SCHRADER

John, how the hell are you?

JOHN BARBER

Man, they'll let just about anyone on these ships these days.

The two men embrace.

BILL SCHRADER

Hey, I heard some disturbing news about you.

JOHN BARBER

Yeah, what's that?

BILL SCHRADER

I heard that you got engaged. Tell me it's just a nasty rumor.

JOHN BARBER

It's no rumor. I met her at Cape Cod on the last leave.

BILL SCHRADER

Yeah, well congratulations. I bet she's pretty happy to see you heading off to the Caribbean rather than over to 'nam.

John continues to unload personal items from his duffel bag.

JOHN BARBER

She might be but I'm not too happy about it.

BILL SCHRADER

What are you talking about?

Bill holds his hands out in front of him, palms up, as if he is weighing the pros and cons of their assignment.

BILL SCHRADER

Okay, let me think about this for a second. Go to Vietnam and get shot at. Or go to the Caribbean during a colder than shit winter, in an air conditioned ship, with multiple visits to warm, sun-drenched beaches, where the women all look like they work in strip clubs.

JOHN BARBER

You, my friend, have a valid point. I just feel an obligation to be a little closer to where the action is. That's all.

BILL SCHRADER

I don't know about you, but I'm hoping to see a lot of action.

JOHN BARBER

There is one thing about this cruise that might make it worth both our whiles.

BILL SCHRADER

What's that?

JOHN BARBER

I checked with the clerk's office a few days ago. There are at least half a dozen crew chiefs who will time out before the end of the cruise.

BILL SCHRADER

And that affects me how?

JOHN BARBER

What would you rather do? Spend your time turning a monkey wrench, or would you rather hop in the back of one of those bad boys and actually go somewhere? You can do what you want, but I'm planning on being first in line when they start looking for replacements.

ARCHIVAL FOOTAGE

Student protesters on college campuses

President Nixon on the Vietnam War

Army charges 14 officers with suppressing information about mass killing of civilians two years earlier at My Lai

INT. ONA ASSISTANT CHIEF PILOT OFFICE ONA HEADQUARTERS -
DAY

ONA Assistant Chief Pilot Ed Veronelli is sitting at a small desk eating lunch. His feet are propped up on the desk. He is thumbing through a Playboy magazine. A rock song with loud guitars blares from a radio.

There is a knock on the door and Steedman enters. Ed removes his feet from the desk and reaches to turn down the radio. He stuffs the Playboy in a drawer.

STEEDMAN

I'm, sorry. I'll catch you after lunch.

Ed brushes crumbs from the desk in a vain attempt to tidy up.

ED VERONELLI

I was just finishing. What's up?

STEEDMAN

You sure? I could come back.

ED VERONELLI

No, really.

STEEDMAN

I wanted to get your opinion on something.

ED VERONELLI

Sure.

STEEDMAN

You know the clause in the lease agreement we signed with ALM that requires us to install an extra fuel tank by April 1.

ED VERONELLI

Yeah.

STEEDMAN

Douglas Aircraft is saying that it's going to take a minimum of four weeks to install the tank. Problem is our backup DC-9 doesn't have the range to fly nonstop, at

least not with the loads that we've been having.

ED VERONELLI

I'd have to take a look at it. But that sounds about right.

STEEDMAN

I'm thinking about asking ALM to delay the tank installation until this summer when the loads drop off.

ED VERONELLI

Makes sense.

STEEDMAN

I know it makes sense. What I want to know is do you think it's safe?

ED VERONELLI

What? You mean is it safe to continue flying without the extra tank?

STEEDMAN

Yes.

Ed gives the question some thought before answering.

ED VERONELLI

It's not unsafe. You can make the flight and still have adequate reserves. But if I had my choice, I'd want the extra tank. Going down there isn't a problem, but coming back is a different story. If you overfly Bermuda, get stronger than forecasted winds, and then get into some bad weather in New York, there could be a problem.

Steedman considers Ed's remarks.

STEEDMAN

Well, I haven't made up my mind. I wanted to get a few opinions before I made the call. I appreciate your input.

ED VERONELLI

Sure thing, Steedman.

EXT. HOTEL POOL - DAY

A woman glides effortlessly through the water. Half a dozen tourists sit around the pool. The woman exits the pool and heads toward a man lying in a lounge chair.

The woman is Margareth Abraham and the man she approaches is her fiancé Robby Schouten. Their conversation is in Papiamentu with subtitles.

ROBBY

I could watch you swim all day.

Margareth grabs a towel from her chair and starts to towel off. She has a shapely figure but wears a modest one piece bathing suit.

MARGARETH

My mom once told me that I learned to swim before I learned how to walk.

ROBBY

I wouldn't doubt it.

(beat)

I've been thinking about something. I don't think you should give your notice. You obviously enjoy your job and it's not right that I ask you to give it up for my own selfish reasons.

MARGARETH

That's sweet of you to say. But you're too late. I gave my notice last week.

ROBBY

You can still change your mind.

MARGARETH

I'm ready to move on. I'll miss the free travel, the ability to go on trips like this one, our trips to New York together. But I won't miss the flying. It's a lot harder than what people think. Besides, I'm looking forward to starting my

new career in television
production.

ROBBY

Would you consider working in
front of the camera?

Margareth throws her towel at Robby, hitting him in the
face.

MARGARETH

You know how I feel about that.
One TV star in this relationship
is enough.

INT. BALSEY'S KITCHEN - DAY

Balsey and his ten-year-old daughter, DENISE, are at the
table eating breakfast. Balsey's wife, Edith, is standing
over the stove. Balsey is dressed in his pilot uniform sans
jacket and hat.

BALSEY

Where's Dean? Is he planning on
getting up anytime soon?

EDITH

It's Saturday. Let him sleep. I'll
make him something when he gets
up.

DENISE

Can I have another pancake?

BALSEY

Me too. I've got a long flight
today.

EDITH

Where did you say you were going?

BALSEY

St. Maarten.

EDITH

And you're complaining. I'd love
to have a little time soaking up
some Caribbean sun.

BALSEY

Trust me; you're not missing anything. We barely have time to get out and stretch.

EXT. BALSEY'S HOUSE - DAY

Balsey exits his house and climbs into his car, tossing his coat and hat into the back seat along with his flight bag.

INT. BALSEY'S CAR - DAY

The New York skyline passes by Balsey's window as he drives to work. The radio plays a mix of music and news. A few of the topics heard on the radio include:

The date, which is May 2 (the day of the accident)

Mother's Day, which is just over a week away

The Kentucky Derby, which is scheduled for later in the day

A story about student protestors on college campuses

EXT. EDISON HOTEL DOWNTOWN MANHATTEN - DAY

The three ALM flight attendants sip coffee while they wait for the van that will take them to the airport.

The three crewmembers are purser WILFRED SPENCER (31), handsome and fit, stewardess Margareth Abraham, and steward TOBIAS (TITO) CORDEIRO (20). Tito is pencil thin and wears thick, dark rimmed glasses. All three crewmembers wear caps.

INT. DOWNTOWN MANHATTAN OFFICE - DAY

EMERSON USSERY, beard, mustache, dark tan, is greeted by a well dressed EXECUTIVE. The office is richly appointed. Skyscrapers are visible from a large picture window.

EXECUTIVE

Emerson, come on in. I'm glad we got a hold of you before you left. Any problems switching flights?

EMERSON

I called Pan Am this morning and they said I shouldn't have any trouble.

EXECUTIVE

Good. This is an important deal
and we want to move quickly.

The executive picks up two checks from his desk. He also
grabs a briefcase from behind the desk.

EXECUTIVE

Here are the two cashier's checks.
Each is for \$150,000. The rest of
it is in this briefcase.

The executive opens the briefcase revealing a large sum of
money. Emerson is shocked by the sight of the cash.

EMERSON

How much is here?

EXECUTIVE

Three hundred and fifty thousand.
Let's just say that our seller
would like to keep some of the
transaction off the books. I'm
sure you understand.

EMERSON

Certainly. I'll see that it gets
delivered.

EXECUTIVE

Great. Someone will be there to
meet you when you land.

EMERSON

Who should I be looking for?

EXECUTIVE

Don't worry. They'll find you.

EXT. TARMAC JFK INTERNATIONAL - DAY

Balsey, navigator HUGH HART (35), tall with a reddish brown
beard, and first officer HARRY EVANS (25), young face,
stocky, hair just over the collar, slightly unkempt,
approach the plane. They are greeted by ONA mechanic GEORGE
CHOPAY.

GEORGE CHOPAY

Balsey, how are you? Looks like a
nice day for flying.

BALSEY

Yeah, days like this I'd almost work for free. Almost.

George hands Balsey the aircraft logbook. Harry and Hugh wait nearby.

GEORGE CHOPAY

She's topped off. There were two write-ups - a coffee maker and an igniter plug. Both have been cleared.

BALSEY

All right. Thanks.

(to Harry)

Harry, you wanna get the walk around? We'll get things started inside.

INT. AIRCRAFT - DAY

Balsey and Hugh enter the aircraft and find the three flight attendants busy with their preflight checks. There are a few quick hellos and introductions then Balsey disappears into the cockpit.

INT. INTERNATIONAL TERMINAL AT JFK AIRPORT - DAY

The ONA DC-9 is visible on the ramp as the passengers wait for boarding.

Passenger Rick Arnold arrives and seeks out his traveling companions Gene and LORETTA Gremelsbacker.

Loretta is an attractive woman in her early twenties. She has a slim figure; her blond hair is long and straight and parted in the middle.

Rick is dressed in a buttoned down shirt and dress pants.

RICK

Hey, Gene, Loretta.

LORETTA

You look all spiffed up.

RICK

Thought I'd splurge a little. Never know who you might run into.

Loretta scans the gate area. Most of the passengers are older and heavy set.

LORETTA

Maybe you'll have better luck in
St. Maarten.

Two women in their early twenties enter the gate area. They are attractive and appear to be traveling together. Rick nods at the pair as they pass by.

RICK

Things are looking up already. So
what time did you guys leave the
bar last night?

LORETTA

About an hour after you did. I
think I got about three hours of
sleep.

RICK

It's a three and a half hour
flight. You'll have plenty of time
to catch up on your sleep.

INT./EXT. DC-9 - DAY

COCKPIT

Balsey is running through his preflight checks. He picks up the PA handset and talks into it.

CABIN

Hugh Hart is standing in the galley looking through a magazine. The PA crackles but the sound is garbled.

BALSEY (O.S)

Hugh, did you hear that okay?

HUGH

It was garbled. Try it again.

Balsey tries the PA once more with the same results.

COCKPIT

Balsey grabs the minimum equipment list (MEL) from his flight bag and thumbs through it until he comes to the page he's looking for.

A CLOSEUP of the page shows the words "cockpit PA handset" and "may be inoperative."

BALSEY

Looks like we can go without it.
I'll write it up when we get back.

INT. INTERNATIONAL TERMINAL JFK AIRPORT - DAY

The passengers line up by the door as an announcement is made that boarding is about to begin.

INT./EXT DC-9 - DAY

Balsey can see the passengers as they walk across the ramp toward the aircraft. He spots two little girls traveling with their parents.

The girls are about four years old. The little girls spot Balsey in the cockpit. They wave and Balsey waves back.

Passenger Rick Arnold and his friends Gene and Loretta head toward the plane. Rick stops before climbing the stairs.

RICK

Man this is a small plane. Are you sure this is the right one?

Rick looks up at the fuselage and sees that it says Overseas National on the side of the plane. He also spots the words "Carib Queen" written below the captain's window. He pulls out his ticket stub for more information.

RICK

I thought this was supposed to be an ALM flight.

LORETTA

This is the right plane. Just keep going.

INT. INTERNATIONAL TERMINAL JFK AIRPORT - DAY

As the passengers continue to exit the terminal for boarding, passenger Emerson Ussery argues with the GATE AGENT.

EMERSON

I called this morning and was told that there wouldn't be any problem.

GATE AGENT

I'm sorry, but I can't accept this ticket. You'll have to go back to Pan Am and work it out with them.

EMERSON

I've already been to Pan Am and they said I could exchange the ticket at the gate.

The gate agent makes a final boarding announcement. A frustrated Emerson Ussery, not wanting to miss this important flight, slams the Pan Am ticket on the counter and walks out the door toward the plane.

INT. DC-9 CABIN - DAY

Emerson Ussery enters the cabin and takes the first seat he comes to, which is seat 1C. Wilfred and Tobias are in the back of the plane helping passengers with their bags and don't notice the last minute passenger.

Margareth is in the galley making sure everything is secure for takeoff when she sees the gate agent and the STATION MANAGER climbing the stairs. A uniformed security officer is right behind them.

Upon entering the cabin, the gate agent points out Emerson to the station manager. Emerson gets out of his seat to plead his case.

EMERSON

I called this morning and was told that there would be no problem in exchanging my ticket. I don't see what -

STATION MANAGER

Sir, please. Take your seat. Just give me a second here.

The station manager discusses the situation with Margareth who doesn't have any objections to Emerson getting on the flight.

STATION MANAGER

Okay, sir. I'm going to let you stay. If there are any questions I'm sure someone will be in touch with you.

EMERSON

Thank you.

Emerson takes the briefcase with the \$350,000 and places it beneath his seat.

COCKPIT

Balsey and Harry have just finished the after start checklist.

HARRY

(into boom mike)

JFK tower, Antillean 980 ready to taxi from the international ramp.

JFK TOWER

(filtered)

Antilean 980, taxi runway 13 right. Information Romeo is current.

CABIN

The two flight attendants give the safety briefing while Pursor Wilfred Spencer reads from a briefing card. It's the standard briefing regarding the use of seatbelts and the location of the emergency exits.

The briefing is first given in English then once more in Dutch. Passenger Rick Arnold, sitting behind his friends Gene and Loretta Gremelsbacker, taps Gene on the shoulder.

RICK

Check it out. They're speaking Dutch.

GENE

It's an international flight.

RICK

I've been reading up on this. Did you know that St. Maarten is the smallest land mass shared by two sovereign nations? The French rule the north and the Dutch rule the south.

LORETTA

You sound like a regular tour guide.

RICK

(reading)

Says here that the Dutch side is known for its duty free shops and gambling. The French side is known for its nude beaches.

LORETTA

Let me guess. You're planning on spending all your time on the French side.

COCKPIT

The plane speeds down the runway and lifts off into an azure sky.

CABIN

Shortly after takeoff, the flight attendants give the life vest demonstration. The passengers pay little attention.

EXT. FARMHOUSE - DAY

Steedman Hinckley is sitting on a porch swing. His wife, Ingrid, and daughter, one-and-a-half-year-old ANNALISA, are leaning against a fence while STEEDMAN'S MOTHER holds the reins to a horse.

Annalisa pets the horse with her mother's help. STEEDMAN'S FATHER exits the house with two glasses in hand. He hands an iced tea to Steedman and sits down next to his son.

STEEDMAN'S FATHER

That's a beautiful wife and child you have. It'd be nice if we could see them a little more often.

STEEDMAN

It's been a little hectic lately. We might be able to get away for a few days in August.

STEEDMAN'S FATHER

So how are things going?

STEEDMAN

Could be better. Those two make it all worthwhile.

Steedman gets up from the swing and leans against the railing. He gazes toward a barn in the distance.

STEEDMAN

Remember the old Cessna?

STEEDMAN'S FATHER

I remember.

STEEDMAN

I used to love taking her up on days like this. Flying over the house. Doing lazy eights. Taking off and landing on that bumpy grass field.

STEEDMAN'S FATHER

I'm not even sure if I could find that old strip anymore. Nothing but weeds now.

STEEDMAN

Come on. Let's go see if Anny wants to go for a horseback ride.

INT./EXT. DC-9 - DAY

CABIN

The passengers settle in for their three-and-a-half-hour flight. The plane is only half full with 57 passengers occupying the 105 available seats.

Passenger Loretta Gremelsbacker sleeps with her head resting on her husband's shoulder.

Passenger Rick Arnold thumbs through a magazine while sipping a Bloody Mary.

Other passengers turn to books and the New York Times to keep them occupied. A few passengers light up cigarettes. The three flight attendants meanwhile are gathered in the forward galley preparing for a beverage service.

COCKPIT

Sunshine fills the cramped cockpit as the three crewmembers unbuckle their shoulder harnesses and sit back in their seats. Harry Evans opens a navigational chart and begins to track the flight. The plane is on autopilot.

EXT. DECK OF THE USS GUADALCANAL - DAY

SUPER OFF THE COAST OF VIEQUES ISLAND PUERTO RICO

There is a flurry of activity. Military personnel cover the deck performing myriad tasks. A CH-46 helicopter is guided onto the ship and then unloads a full load of marines from a rear loading ramp.

The marines are dressed in full battle gear. The last to leave the back of the helicopter is John Barber. The engines are shut down and the rotor blades come to a stop. The two pilots ART NASH and BILL MURPHY exit the cockpit.

ART NASH

We're gonna go grab a bite to eat.

JOHN BARBER

I'll be down in a few minutes. I need to sweep up. Damn jar heads brought half the beach with them.

Another CH-46 helicopter lands on the Guadalcanal. The crew chief, Bill Schrader, spots John sweeping out the back of his helicopter and approaches him.

BILL SCHRADER

John, got a minute?

JOHN BARBER

Sure. How's the checkride going?

BILL SCHRADER

Not bad. Unloaded a jeep. Did a supply lift. Piece of cake. He's asked a hundred questions, though. I wish I would have studied more.

JOHN BARBER

He's into numbers.

BILL SCHRADER

Yeah, I know. What's the max lift capacity for the hoist?

JOHN BARBER

Six hundred pounds.

BILL SCHRADER

How about max speed?

JOHN BARBER

One hundred and forty-five knots.

John leans the broom against the helicopter. He pats Bill on the shoulder and gives him a look of encouragement.

JOHN BARBER

Relax. He's down at the mess hall stuffing his face. By the time he gets back he'll be ready for a nap. You'll do fine.

INT. HOUSE OF LT. COMMANDER JIM RYLEE - DAY

SUPER ROOSEVELT ROADS NAVAL STATION, PUERTO RICO

Jim Rylee is watching television. He is dressed in civilian clothes. On the screen is a sports announcer. Behind the sports announcer are horses and a race track. The announcer is speaking in Spanish.

Jim's Wife, DONNA RYLEE, enters the living room from outside.

DONNA RYLEE

Jim, the boys want to know if they can take the sail boat out.

JIM RYLEE

(sounding under the weather)

Absolutely not. It's been stormin' all morning. Don't they have any sense? Must be blowing thirty knots out there. Tell 'em no.

Jim blows his nose into some tissue paper and tosses the wadded up paper into a basket by his chair. Donna steps outside and returns a few seconds later.

DONNA RYLEE

Can I get you anything?

JIM RYLEE

I'm fine.

Donna stops and looks at the television.

DONNA RYLEE

What are you watching?

JIM RYLEE

The Kentucky Derby.

INT. DC-9 - DAY

CABIN

Stewardess Margareth Abraham hands Rick another Bloody Mary. Rick spots Margareth's engagement ring.

RICK

That's some ring you've got there.

Margareth smiles as she admires the ring herself.

MARGARETH

Thanks. It's so big I'm almost embarrassed to wear it.

RICK

So who's the lucky guy?

MARGARETH

His name is Robby Schouten. He's a television producer. We're getting married next month. This is my last trip.

COCKPIT

Harry has the en route map on his lap and notes the time as they pass over the island of Bermuda.

HARRY

There's Bermuda.

(refers to his
charts)

Looks like we're right on flight plan. About two hundred pounds to the good on the fuel.

Harry peers down at the tiny island from his side window.

HARRY

Not much to look at from here.

HUGH

It's a nice place to visit, but I'm not too upset that we're not stopping. I don't want to prolong

this flight any longer than we
have to. My back is killing me.

Balsey takes a sip of coffee. He spills some of it on his
shirt as the plane is jostled by some light turbulence.

HARRY

You wanna ask for higher?

Balsey looks ahead and sees some high cirrus clouds.

BALSEY

I think we might be better off
going down.

Balsey reaches up and turns on the seatbelt sign.

CABIN

Tobias is standing in the forward galley when he hears the
chime indicating that the seatbelt sign has been turned on.
He knocks on the cockpit door and enters the cockpit,
closing the door behind him.

COCKPIT

TOBIAS

(to Balsey)

Are you gonna make an
announcement.

BALSEY

I can't make any announcements.
The PA's not working.

CABIN

Tobias exits the cockpit and picks up the PA handset from
the forward bulkhead.

TOBIAS

(over the PA)

Ladies and gentleman, please
return to your seats and fasten
your seatbelts. We are expecting
some light turbulence.

Passenger ARTHUR JOHNSON is sitting by the aft right wing
exit window. His wife, SYBIL JOHNSON, is sitting in the
aisle seat in the same row, reading a book.

SYBIL JOHNSON

(to her husband)

What'd he say?

ARTHUR JOHNSON

It was the captain. He said to make sure you're wearing your seatbelt. They're expecting turbulence.

SYBIL JOHNSON

What turbulence? I haven't felt a bump since we took off.

INT. BILL BOHLKE'S FLIGHT SCHOOL - DAY

SUPER ST. CROIX AIRPORT, ST CROIX, U.S. VIRGIN ISLANDS

Flight instructor GEORGE JOHNSON is on the phone in the passenger lounge. His student, ANDY TITUS, is sitting on an oversized recliner reading a magazine.

On the opposite side of the room is a long counter. Behind the counter is BILL BOHLKE JR. (23), baby faced with a stocky build. A large window looks out on to the ramp. Several small aircraft are tied down. A Skyvan is parked near the grass. It is overcast and windy.

GEORGE JOHNSON

(to Andy Titus)

Doesn't look good. They're forecasting thunderstorms all day.

ANDY TITUS

We can try again next weekend. It looks pretty crappy out there.

(to Bill)

So where's Tuddy? Haven't seen her all day.

BILL BOHLKE

She came in to work but decided to go to her girlfriend's. She said she thought she might be feeling labor pains.

ANDY TITUS

Uh oh. You know what that means. This could be the day.

BILL BOHLKE

I hope not. I've got too much work to do.

ANDY TITUS

You're about to become a father and all you can think about is work.

Mechanic GEORGE STOUTE enters the flight school from a door that leads to the hangar. George is dark skinned and speaks with a Caribbean accent. He is wearing overhauls and a baseball cap.

GEORGE STOUTE

(to Bill Bohlke)

Have you seen Tuddy?

BILL BOHLKE

She went to her girlfriends.

GEORGE JOHNSON

She was feeling labor pains.

GEORGE STOUTE

Labor pains? You should go. That baby is coming today.

BILL BOHLKE

Don't worry. If Tuddy needs to go to the hospital she'll call.

INT./EXT. DC-9 - DAY

COCKPIT

Harry Evans jots down the time as they pass over another intersection.

HARRY

Looks like we're about twenty minutes behind flight plan.

HUGH

That low pressure area must have shifted to the west.

Balsey glances at the fuel totalizer.

A CLOSEUP of the totalizer shows 8600 pounds.

BALSEY

We should be all right. We should still land with about 6,000 pounds.

Hugh gets up from the observers seat and slides it back against the bulkhead.

HUGH

I'm going to the back. You guys need anything?

BALSEY

I'm okay.

HARRY

Nothing for me.

CABIN

Hugh pours himself an orange juice then takes a seat on the forward left flight attendant jump seat. Purser Wilfred Spencer walks up the aisle after completing a final walk through of the cabin. He takes his seat next to Hugh.

WILFRED

How much longer?

HUGH

About thirty minutes. We picked up some unexpected headwinds.

Hugh takes a few sips of his orange juice then notices the plane bank to the right. The turn is unexpected.

HUGH

I can't leave those guys alone for a minute without them getting lost. I better go see what's going on.

COCKPIT

Harry has an approach chart book out and is thumbing through the charts as Hugh enters the cockpit.

HUGH

What's up?

BALSEY

We're diverting to San Juan.
Weather's below minimums at St.
Maarten.

HUGH

Great. I knew I should have stayed
home.

Hugh grabs a clipboard from his flight bag. He remains
standing and uses the jump seat as a table to write on.

INT. PASSENGER TERMINAL AT THE ST. MAARTEN AIRPORT - DAY

SUPER - ST. MAARTEN, JULIANA AIRPORT

Several people wait near the ALM ticket counter. An ALM
TICKET AGENT picks up the PA to make an announcement.

ALM TICKET AGENT

(over PA)

Your attention please. For anyone
waiting for the arrival of ALM
flight 980 from New York. I have
just been informed that flight 980
has diverted to San Juan due to
weather conditions here at St.
Maarten. If there are any changes,
I will make another announcement.
Once again, flight 980 from New
York has diverted to San Juan due
to weather.

An UNIDENTIFIED MAN approaches the ticket counter. The man
is better dressed than the other people in the waiting
area. He is upset with the news of the diversion.

UNIDENTIFIED MAN

What's this about a diversion? The
weather doesn't look all that bad.

The gate agent turns around to face a large plate-glass
window that overlooks the ramp. It's overcast and windy
with ominous looking dark clouds.

ALM TICKET AGENT

I'm sorry sir. I'm just passing on
what I've been told.

UNIDENTIFIED MAN

Who made this decision?

ALM TICKET AGENT

I don't know sir. I just got the message from the tower controller.

The man storms off mumbling to himself.

INT. JULIANA TOWER CAB (NOTE: JULIANA IS THE NAME OF THE ST. MAARTEN AIRPORT) - DAY

The JULIANA TOWER OPERATOR is standing looking out at the stormy weather. Low ceilings and a misty atmosphere obstruct part of the mountains off to the east.

A LOCAL PILOT sits at the opposite end of the tower cab engrossed in a book. The unidentified man from the earlier scene enters the tower cab and approaches the tower operator.

LOCAL PILOT'S POV -- The two men have a discussion out of ear shot of the local pilot. The tower operator points toward the partially obscured mountains. There is more discussion.

With the unidentified man looking on, the tower operator lifts a toggle switch on his console and begins to speak into his headset.

JULIANA TOWER OPERATOR

(into boom mike)

San Juan, Juliana.

The local pilot peeks up over his book as the tower operator makes the call. The unidentified man has a smug look of satisfaction on his face.

The tower operator notices the local pilot staring at him and averts his gaze.

INT. COCKPIT DC-9 - DAY

SAN JUAN CENTER

(filtered)

Antillean 980, San Juan Center.

HARRY

(into handheld mike)

San Juan, this is 980. Go ahead.

SAN JUAN CENTER

We just got a call from the Juliana tower operator. He'd like you to call him on the tower frequency.

BALSEY

Wonder what that's all about?

HARRY

(into handheld mike)
Roger, 980.

BALSEY

I'll get it on two. You monitor one.

Balsey switches to the number two radio and tunes in the St. Maarten tower frequency.

BALSEY

(into handheld mike)
Juliana tower, nine eight zero over.

JULIANA TOWER

(filtered)
LM980, Juliana tower go ahead.

BALSEY

(into handheld mike)
Well, I just got a message you were below minimums. I've already started my diversion for San Juan.

JULIANA TOWER

(filtered)
Roger. That is what we passed to the center, but at the present time there is a slight improvement. It calls for estimated ceiling 1,000 broken, 5,000 overcast, visibility 4 to 5 nautical miles in continuous rain.

BALSEY

Roger.

Balsey glances at the fuel totalizer.

A CLOSEUP reveals 6,200 pounds.

BALSEY

I think we should at least go down
and take a look. If it's below
minimums we'll head for St.
Thomas.

When neither Harry nor Hugh objects, Balsey makes his
decision.

BALSEY

(to Harry)

Tell San Juan that we want to
proceed direct to St. Maarten.

INT. SAN JUAN AIR ROUTE TRAFFIC CONTROL CENTER - DAY

SUPER SAN JUAN AIR ROUTE TRAFFIC CONTROL CENTER (ARTCC)

Four controllers sit in front of radar screens in a dark,
windowless room. Controller CHARLES SAUNDERS sits at a desk
near another controller. Saunders does not have a radar
screen in front of him. Sitting to his left is controller
ALEXANDER SAMBOLIN.

ALEXANDER SAMBOLIN

(to Charles
Saunders)

Antillean 980 is heading back to
St. Maarten. I also have a
November one nine eight one whisky
headed for St. Maarten. He'll be
holding at the beacon at 5,000.

Charles Saunders writes down the information. He then
reaches up to hit one of three toggle switches on his
console.

A CLOSEUP shows that he is reaching for the toggle switch
labeled St. Maarten.

CHARLES SAUNDERS

(into boom mike)

Juliana, San Juan.

JULIANA TOWER

(filtered)

This is Juliana, go ahead.

CHARLES SAUNDERS

Looks like Antillean 980 is headed
back towards you. Also have a

N1981W inbound as well to hold at
the beacon at 5,000.

INT. TOWER CAB JULIANA TOWER - DAY

The Juliana tower operator looks out his tower cab. The mountains to the east are now totally obstructed. The weather has deteriorated. He looks concerned as he acknowledges the San Juan controller.

JULIANA TOWER OPERATOR

Roger.

INT. DC-9 COCKPIT - DAY

The plane is in the clouds and being pelted by heavy rain. Balsey and Harry have both put on their lightweight headsets.

SAN JUAN CENTER

(filtered)

Antillean 980 cleared direct to
the PJM radio beacon; descend and
maintain 2,000 feet; cleared NDB
runway 9 approach. Contact Juliana
tower on 118.7.

HARRY

(into boom mike)

980 roger. Cleared direct to PJM;
down to 2,000, and cleared for the
approach.

INT. JULIANA TOWER - DAY

The tower operator peers through a set of binoculars as he searches for ALM 980. The local pilot, who has been listening in, puts down his book and starts looking for the approaching aircraft along with the tower operator.

INT. DC-9 COCKPIT - DAY

Balsey is hand flying the aircraft. Hugh remains standing. He wedges himself in behind Balsey's seat and glances out the side window. He catches a glimpse of the water, but forward visibility is still zero.

EXT. RAMP AT JULIANA AIRPORT - DAY

A pilot stands under the wing of a Cessna 172, trying to stay out of the rain.

INT. SAN JUAN AIR ROUTE TRAFFIC CONTROL CENTER - DAY

Controller CHARLES SILVIA walks up behind controller ALEXANDER SAMBOLIN and taps him on the shoulder.

CHARLES SILVIA

It's 3:30. Nap's over.

Alex holds up his hand to indicate that he's busy and can't talk.

ALEXANDER SAMBOLIN

(into boom mike)

N1981W understand you're entering the hold at 5,000... Pan Am 250 you are cleared to deviate around weather west ten degrees.

(to Charles
Saunders)

Is ALM 980 on the ground yet?

CHARLES SAUNDERS

Negative.

Alexander Sambolin finally turns around to acknowledge his replacement.

ALEXANDER SAMBOLIN

(to Charles Silvia)

You better plug in. I'm not gonna have time to give you a brief. I've got a scope full of deviations.

INT./EXT. DC-9 - DAY

COCKPIT

Rain continues to pound against the windscreen. It's coming down so hard it looks like they're flying through a car wash.

BALSEY

Gear down, flaps to twenty-five.

Harry complies. The rain starts to let up. Forward visibility improves. Hugh is first to spot the runway.

HUGH

I got the VASI's (visual approach slope indicator) about ten o'clock.

Balsey looks to his left and sees the runway, but they are not in a position to land.

BALSEY

We're too high. I'm going to circle to the north. Harry, keep your eyes on those mountains to the east.

CABIN

Passenger JEANNIE LARMONY, an older woman in her late fifties, glances out her window and watches the runway pass beneath her as the plane banks left to begin its circle.

INT. JULIANA TOWER - DAY

The tower controller is following the aircraft with binoculars as it circles north of the airport. He loses the plane as it skirts in and out of a ragged ceiling.

INT. DC-9 COCKPIT - DAY

Balsey is having a difficult time keeping the runway in sight due to low ceilings and rain. He banks the plane hard to the left, but he is too close to the runway and overshoots it.

BALSEY

We're gonna have to go around again. Leave the gear and flaps down. We need to stay close to the runway. Just keep watching for those mountains.

The runway is visible out the cockpit window as Balsey begins his second circle. The rain picks up just as Balsey is about to turn back toward the runway on the base leg.

BALSEY

Give me flaps forty.

Harry reaches for the flap handle and lowers it to 40 degrees. The rain is coming down hard now and the runway is barely visible. As the plane rolls out on final, they are too high. Balsey pushes the nose down.

BALSEY

This is nuts. Gear up!

EXT. JULIANA AIRPORT RAMP - DAY

The pilot who had been standing beneath the wing of his Cessna 172 is now sitting in the cockpit of the plane. The rain is coming down hard. He strains his neck to catch the DC-9 as it passes over the runway at 200 feet.

INT./EXT. DC-9 - DAY

CABIN

Passenger VIVIAN ROSOTO, sitting in seat 1A, turns to passenger Emerson Ussery, who is sitting two seats to her left.

VIVIAN ROSOTO

What's going to happen now?

EMERSON

We'll probably go to another airport where the weather's better.

Passenger Jeannie Larmony is still glued to her cabin window. The plane is flying very low to the ground and the tops of the houses and hotels appear dangerously close.

EXT. ST. MAARTEN - DAY

A man holding an umbrella is startled by the sound of a low flying jet. He looks skyward and catches the plane as it passes overhead only a few hundred feet above the ground.

INT./EXT. DC-9 - DAY

COCKPIT

Balsey is struggling with the aircraft.

BALSEY

(to Harry)

Tell him we're going to our alternate.

HARRY

(into boom mike)

Juliana tower, 980. We need to go to St. Thomas.

INT. JULIANA TOWER - DAY

The tower operator is scanning the skies looking for ALM 980. He hears Harry's radio call, but just before he can reply he is startled by the sight of the plane as it appears unexpectedly and passes directly over the tower cab.

The plane is so close to the tower cab that the tower operator ducks as it passes overhead.

INT. DC-9 COCKPIT - DAY

When the tower operator doesn't respond to Harry's radio call, Balsey makes the call himself.

BALSEY

(authoritative)

Juliana, nine eighty. We would like to have an immediate and direct route to St. Thomas.

INT. DC-9 CABIN - DAY

Wilfred Spencer is sitting in the flight attendant jump seat facing the passengers. A few passengers make eye contact with him. But Wilfred is just as confused as they are.

He peers out the small window in the main cabin door. He sees only dark clouds and rain.

INT. SAN JUAN AIR ROUTE TRAFFIC CONTROL CENTER

Controller Alexander Sambolin has switched places with Silvia. Sambolin now stands behind Silvia with his headset still plugged into the console.

CHARLES SAUNDERS

(to Silvia)

Antillean 980, is diverting to St. Thomas.

CHARLES SILVIA

Have him fly a heading of 250 degrees, maintain 4,000. And have him contact me on 125.0.

INT. DC-9 COCKPIT - DAY

The plane is being rocked by heavy turbulence. Hugh Hart, who is still standing behind Balsey's seat, glances at the fuel totalizer.

A CLOSEUP of the fuel totalizer shows the digits spinning like a slot machine whose lever had just been pulled.

HUGH

Balsey, this sonofabitch is spinning like hell.

BALSEY

It should stop spinning when we level out.

Hugh stares at the spinning totalizer.

A CLOSEUP shows the totalizer finally settling down at 850 pounds.

HUGH

You're kidding. Can that be right?

Balsey now glances at the fuel totalizer.

BALSEY

When we get into some smooth air, she'll stable out. There's no way we can have less than 2,000 pounds of fuel on board this aircraft.

SAN JUAN CENTER

(filtered)

Antillean nine eighty, San Juan Center. Squawk two one zero zero and ident, Verify maintaining four thousand.

BALSEY

(to Harry)

Ask him for higher.

HARRY

(into boom mike)

We are level at four thousand. And we are requesting higher.

SAN JUAN CENTER

(filtered)

Antillean nine eighty, roger.
Standby for higher.

BALSEY

(to Harry)

Let me talk to him.
(into boom mike)
San Juan, nine eighty.

SAN JUAN CENTER

(filtered)

Antillean nine eighty, what
altitude are you requesting?

BALSEY

(into boom mike)

Anything you've got higher. I'm a
little short on fuel and I gotta
get up.

Balsey is hand flying the aircraft. He turns around to
address Hugh.

BALSEY

Hugh, do me a favor and see if
there's anything closer than St.
Thomas.

Hugh grabs the en route chart and unfolds it.

A CLOSEUP of the chart shows St. Maarten and several nearby
islands including St. Thomas and St. Croix.

HUGH

Looks like St. Croix is closer.

SAN JUAN CENTER

(filtered)

Antillean 980, climb and maintain
flight level one two zero.

HARRY

(into boom mike)

Roger, up to one two zero out of
four.

BALSEY

(into boom mike)

San Juan Center, Antillean nine eighty, do you have radar contact with us?

SAN JUAN CENTER

(filtered)

Antillean nine eighty that is affirmative. You're on radar.

BALSEY

(into boom mike)

How far from St. Thomas are we?

SAN JUAN CENTER

(filtered)

Roger, from St. Thomas you're nine two miles south east.

BALSEY

(into boom mike)

How far am I from St. Croix?

SAN JUAN CENTER

(filtered)

Nine eighty, you're from St. Croix... you're seventy miles northeast, seven zero miles.

BALSEY

(into boom mike)

Okay, I'd like to divert to St. Croix.

CABIN/COCKPIT

Wilfred is sitting in his jump seat when he notices the red call light on the ceiling light up. He unbuckles his seatbelt then opens the cockpit door.

WILFRED

Did you call me?

BALSEY

(sounding irritated)

No. We didn't call you.

Wilfred looks around the cockpit at the other two crewmembers. When neither of them speaks up, he returns to his seat.

As soon as Wilfred closes the cockpit door, Balsey addresses Harry sternly.

BALSEY

I'm still the captain; I'll decide whether or not we need to notify the cabin crew. Now get me the approach charts for St. Croix.

Balsey is interrupted by the SOUND of the MASTER CAUTION ALARM along with the momentary illumination of the right inlet fuel pressure light. Balsey scans his instruments for more information.

A CLOSEUP shows the right inlet fuel pressure light on then off; the fuel totalizer indicates 550 pounds of fuel; the altimeter shows the plane passing through 6,500 feet.

Balsey immediately reaches up to the overhead panel and turns on all the fuel boost pumps. He turns to address Hugh.

BALSEY

You better get the purser back up here.

Balsey glances briefly at Harry with a look of conciliation.

Hugh presses the flight attendant call button on the overhead panel. He then grabs the life vest from under the observer jump seat before opening the cockpit door for Wilfred.

HUGH

(to Wilfred)

Problems. We're running out of gas.

Upon hearing this, Wilfred steps fully into the cockpit and closes the door behind him.

BALSEY

We're running out of fuel. We might have to ditch the aircraft.

The cockpit is silent as Wilfred contemplates this unexpected news.

WILFRED

Shall I inform the passengers?

Once again the cockpit falls silent. After a few uncomfortable beats, Harry Evans addresses Balsey.

HARRY

Captain, I think we have to inform them now.

BALSEY

Go ahead, Spence. Inform the passengers.

CABIN

Wilfred Spenser exits the cockpit and walks determinedly toward the rear of the aircraft, stopping briefly near the forward right overwing exit where Tobias (Tito) Cordeiro is sitting.

WILFRED

(in Papiamentu)

Tito, nos tin ku duna
demonstrashon di life vest aweor
umbes.

Tito gets up from his seat and follows Wilfred to the back of the cabin where stewardess Margareth Abraham is sitting.

Passenger Rick Arnold watches the three from his seat as Wilfred briefs Tito and Margareth. Passenger Gene Gremmelsbacker, who is sitting in the window seat one row ahead of Rick, can't see over the heads of the other passengers.

GENE GREMMELSBACKER

(to Rick)

What's going on?

RICK

I'm not sure. Looks like something's up, though.

After having been briefed about a possible ditching, Tito and Margareth grab their life vests from under their jump seats then take their positions in the cabin - Margareth in the front of the cabin and Tito in the middle.

Wilfred remains in the rear of the plane and picks up the cabin PA.

WILFRED

(into PA)

Your attention please. The captain has just advised me that we are running low on fuel and that we are to prepare for a possible ditching as a precautionary measure.

The passengers are understandably alarmed, but there is no panic. Margareth and Tito don their life vests and begin their demonstration while Wilfred continues to give instructions over the PA.

One by one the passengers start to grab their life vests from under their seats.

WILFRED

(into PA)

Once you place the life vest over your head, you must tighten the waist straps around your waist. Do not tighten the straps too tightly. To inflate the life vest you must pull down on one of the two inflation tabs. Do not inflate your life vest until after you exit the aircraft.

As soon as Wilfred finishes his instructions, the three flight attendants begin helping passengers don their life vests.

A number of passengers have difficulty removing their life vest from the pouch. Some have to unbuckle their seatbelts. Some have to get out of their seats and on their knees.

Several passengers have difficulty with the pull tabs. One passenger removes a pocket knife and cuts into the plastic cover to free his life vest.

Some passengers stand in the aisle as they don their life vests. An ELDERLY MALE PASSENGER asks Wilfred for his assistance.

ELDERLY MALE PASSENGER

Is this on right?

Wilfred removes the vest from the man's head and reverses it. He then snaps the waist straps together and pulls it tight before helping another passenger.

COCKPIT

The plane is in and out of rain showers. Lightning flashes light up the dark clouds like flashes from a camera.

Balsey scans his instruments once more.

A CLOSEUP shows the fuel at 480 pounds; the altimeter shows the plane passing 7,000 feet.

BALSEY

You know, we don't stand a chance if we flame out at altitude. We're going to have to get this thing down.

(into boom mike)

San Juan, nine eighty. I'd like to descend now.

SAN JUAN CENTER

(filtered)

Okay, descend and maintain five thousand.

BALSEY

(into boom mike)

Okay, I'm leaving seven for five.

CABIN

Wilfred walks up the aisle from the rear of the aircraft. He is stopped by the father of the two little girls, WILLIAM CALDWELL.

The girls have the vests on over their heads, but the waist straps dangle uselessly from the bottom of the vests. The girls are too small for the vests.

WILLIAM CALDWELL

Excuse me. Can you help us? I'm not sure what to do with the waist straps.

The two girls are standing in the aisle. Their mother, GLORIA CALDWELL, is attempting to adjust the vests. The girls are giggling as if their mom is getting them ready for the pool.

GLORIA CALDWELL

Come on, sweetie, be still. Mommy has to get this on you.

Wilfred reaches for the waist straps then connects the two ends between each girl's legs. He then pulls the straps tight. When he finishes, he inflates both vests.

WILFRED

They're too small to inflate their vests by themselves.

COCKPIT

Thick dark clouds race by the cockpit windows. The turbulence is moderate.

BALSEY

(into mike)

San Juan, How far am I from...ah...St. Croix now?

SAN JUAN CENTER

(filtered)

Nine eighty, you're...ah...fifty seven miles.

Balsey glances once more at the fuel totalizer.

A CLOSEUP shows that the fuel totalizer is indicating under 300 pounds of fuel remaining. Balsey shakes his head as he realizes that having to ditch the aircraft is inevitable.

BALSEY

(into mike)

Okay, there's a possibility I may have to ditch this aircraft. I am now descending to the water.

INT. SAN JUAN CENTER - DAY

Controller Charles Silvia turns to look for his SUPERVISOR. The supervisor is standing directly behind him along with a group of three off duty controllers.

Nothing is said. Everyone near the radar can overhear the communications between Silvia and ALM 980. The supervisor walks to a nearby phone and lifts the receiver.

INT./EXT. DC-9 - DAY

COCKPIT

Hugh Hart, who has remained standing behind Balsey since reentering the cockpit, returns to the jump seat. The move catches Balsey's attention.

BALSEY

You better get back to the cabin
and see if you can help out.

Hugh reaches for the cockpit door but decides to put on his life vest first.

CABIN/COCKPIT

Hugh steps into the forward galley but leaves the cockpit door open so he can communicate with Balsey and Harry. He spots Wilfred Spencer as Wilfred makes his way to the front of the cabin.

HUGH

How many life rafts do we have?

WILFRED

There are four rafts in the
overhead bins in the center of the
cabin and one raft in the coat
closet.

Hugh opens the left side coat closet and sees the life raft sitting on the floor. There are a few loose items resting on top of the raft: some coats, newspapers, and one or two small bags.

Hugh shoves those items to the back then grabs the raft package and starts to pull on it.

HUGH

(to Wilfred)

Can you give me a hand?

Both men tug on the raft but they can barely get it to budge. The raft has flattened over time and is wedged in tightly.

HUGH

I need to check with Balsey about
something. I'll be right back.

Hugh disappears into the cockpit.

Passenger Emerson Ussery sits almost directly across from the coat closet in seat 1A. The suitcase with the \$350,000 rests securely on his lap.

He sees the purser having difficulty. He places the suitcase back under his seat then gets up to help Wilfred pull the life raft out of the coat closet and into the aisle.

In the back of the plane an OLDER FEMALE PASSENGER with gray hair and a distinctive looking dark blue blouse with white polka-dots, holds a life vest in her hands.

OLDER FEMALE PASSENGER

I'm not putting on this silly life vest unless the captain makes some kind of announcement. The purser is just overreacting.

The woman tosses her life vest on an empty seat beside her.

A male passenger reaches into the overhead bin and pulls out a camera from his bag. He makes a few adjustments then starts snapping pictures.

A second male passenger sees this and grabs his camera. The two men snap pictures as they make their way up the aisle. They, too, are not wearing life vests.

COCKPIT

Glimpses of the water can be seen as the plane descends through the overcast. The sea is a frothy white.

CABIN

The life raft from the coat closet is now lying in the forward galley. Hugh examines the raft, looking for the inflation lanyard.

HUGH

There's no lanyard.

He starts unsnapping the outer casing of the raft. He finds the lanyard, but the lanyard is entangled with the mooring line.

In the middle of the plane, Passenger Rick Arnold assists a female passenger sitting across from him. Loretta

Gremelsbacker, who is sitting in the middle seat in the row directly in front of Rick, sees Rick standing in the aisle.

LORETTA GREMELSBACKER

Rick, why don't you join us?

Rick tightens the waist straps of the female passenger he is assisting then takes the aisle seat next to Loretta and Gene Gremelsbacker.

RICK

I sure hope those pilots know what the hell they're doing.

Rick leans to the side to glance down the aisle toward the cockpit. The two little girls are now sitting on the laps of their parents on each side of the aisle.

Except for one man standing near his seat, Rick has an unobstructed view of the cockpit. The door is open just enough for him to catch a glimpse of several warning lights.

COCKPIT

A CLOSEUP shows that the right fuel inlet pressure light is illuminated on the overhead panel. The amber master caution light is also illuminated on the glare shield. The lights are on for only a few seconds before extinguishing.

BALSEY

Give me flaps fifteen.

Harry selects the flaps to fifteen degrees. The low pressure fuel light and master caution lights come on once again. This time they stay on.

BALSEY

Okay, full flaps.

Balsey scans the water looking for a place to set the plane down.

BALSEY

Hold on tight, Harry.

EXT. AIRCRAFT - DAY

The DC-9 flies only a few feet above a turbulent sea. The sky above is equally turbulent with thick dark clouds and tendrils of virga reaching down from a ragged ceiling.

CABIN

After some struggle, Hugh Hart manages to free the entangled inflation lanyard on the life raft. No sooner than he has the lanyard free he looks out through the galley window and notices how close they are to the water.

HUGH

Sit down! Everybody sit down!

Wilfred Spencer immediately sits down on the flight attendant jump seat next to the main cabin door. Hugh takes the jump seat near the cockpit door.

Tobias has no place to sit. He sits down on the life raft with his back against the forward bulkhead.

Passenger Emerson Ussery hears Hugh yelling from the galley. He looks back toward the rear of the plane and sees that many of the passengers are still standing.

EMERSON USSERY

Everybody take your seat!

Stewardess Margareth Abraham is standing in the aisle a few rows down from Emerson. She hears the yells behind her. She notices that the emergency escape path lighting has come on then off then back on again.

She looks out through a passenger window and sees the water rushing up to meet the plane. She immediately starts shoving passengers into their seats. She doesn't get much past row four before the plane strikes the water.

When the plane hits the water, the deceleration is rapid and severe. Anything not secured inside the aircraft is immediately sent airborne.

Passengers who were standing are thrown forward and upward. Seats, with passengers still strapped in, are torn from the floorboards.

Passenger Jeannie Larmony, who is sitting in seat 16A, is thrown from her seat up against the ceiling. She then travels ten rows forward over the heads of passengers as her head and back scrape up against the air vents and reading lights.

Overhead bins pop open, spilling their contents on the heads of passengers. Several oxygen masks drop from the ceiling.

In the forward galley, the two stewards and the navigator are bombarded with galley equipment: soda cans, cups, plastic utensils, coffee makers, bins, food trays, etc...

A number of passengers have also been thrown forward all the way to the cockpit door. They lie dazed in a huge pile in the forward galley.

COCKPIT

Balsey is hanging on to the yoke with both hands. The plane is vibrating so severely that it is impossible to read a single instrument. The SOUND of PEOPLE AND DEBRIS SMASHING INTO THE COCKPIT DOOR can be heard behind him.

Then it gets quiet. Eerily quiet. The vibration stops and the plane seems to be gliding through space. Balsey hears the distinct SOUND of BUBBLES above him. He looks out the cockpit window and sees only water.

CABIN

In the forward galley, the passengers who were thrown forward slowly begin picking themselves up off the pile and start working their way back toward the cabin where their husbands and wives had been sitting.

Wilfred and Hugh get up and try to open the main cabin door. A few passengers remain in the galley area. A PANICKED PASSENGER pushes his way forward.

PANICKED PASSENGER

Let's get out of here! We gotta get out of here!

WILFRED

Calm down. Everybody move back!

Wilfred tries rotating the handle, but the handle moves only a few inches.

On the opposite side of the galley, Steward Tobias Cordeiro is trying to open the forward right galley door. It too is stuck.

Tobias looks down and notices that water is starting to seep into the aircraft from the floorboards. It's already up to his ankles. He moves away from the galley door then kicks the handle with his left foot. The jolt frees the handle.

As soon as the door is open, four passengers immediately jump into the water.

In the middle of the aircraft, passengers stream out through the aft right overwing exit.

One passenger, a HEAVYSET FEMALE, stops in the middle of the aisle and tries unsuccessfully to open an overhead bin. Her HUSBAND is waiting in line to get out through the overwing exit.

HUSBAND

What are you doing?

HEAVYSET FEMALE PASSENGER

My purse.

HUSBAND

Forget that. We have to get out of here.

The woman abandons the overhead bin and reluctantly exits the plane behind her husband.

Passenger Rick Arnold rubs his forehead as he slowly regains his senses. He notices blood dripping down from his forehead. He holds his right hand in front of him and sees a gash in his middle finger.

He looks to his right to help his friends Loretta and Gene Gremelsbacker. Loretta is sitting slumped over.

Rick looks to where Gene was sitting, but Gene is no longer there. His entire seat has been ripped from the floor; there is nothing there but an empty space. Rick shakes Loretta by the shoulder.

RICK

Loretta, are you all right?

When Loretta doesn't respond, Rick reaches over and unbuckles her seatbelt. He then gets up from his seat and physically lifts her from her seat.

Loretta starts to regain consciousness as she is dragged toward the opened emergency exit. Another passenger helps Rick carry Loretta through the exit.

COCKPIT

Balsey looks over at Harry Evans who is sitting motionless in his seat. He doesn't appear to be injured.

BALSEY

Harry.

Harry is in shock and doesn't respond. Balsey reaches behind Harry's seat and removes the stowed life vest. He removes the vest from the protective cover and hands it to him.

BALSEY

Here, put this on.

(beat)

I need in you in back to help with the evacuation.

Harry slips the life vest on then heads for the cockpit door. He finds that the door has buckled and won't move.

HARRY

It's stuck.

There is a small opening in the door. Harry tries squeezing through the opening but can't quite make it. Balsey tugs on the door with his left hand while pushing Harry with his right.

Finally Harry manages to squeeze through the opening and into the forward galley.

CABIN

Debris litters the galley. The cabin looks as if there had just been an explosion. There are bodies in the aisle. One man lies prone on the galley floor waving his arms in an exaggerated swimming motion.

HUGH

Harry, give us a hand with the life raft.

Harry steps over the man on the floor and reaches for the life raft. Wilfred and Hugh each pick up debris from the galley floor and toss it out the opened door to give them more room in which to work.

HUGH

Okay, let's try it now.

All four men grab the raft and slide it toward the galley door. Water rushes in through the opened galley door and washes back out in big waves. They move the raft almost to the point to where Wilfred is almost out the door.

TOBIAS

(to Wilfred)

Wilfred, we're going to get it out. Leave the aircraft.

Wilfred takes one look behind him then jumps into the water. Hugh then works his way around toward the end of the raft.

The man on the floor in a panic is complicating things, forcing the men to work around him. Then unexpectedly, the man on the floor reaches up and grabs the inflation lanyard.

Hugh sees this but can only watch in horror as the man pulls the lanyard, inflating the life raft inside the aircraft.

Hugh picks up a plastic knife and thrusts it into the hard rubbery surface. The knife breaks in two. Tobias tries the same thing with a plastic fork and has the same result.

Hugh tries to get into a better position and inadvertently steps backward and into the water.

EXT. UNDERWATER - DAY

Hugh Hart, with his clothes and shoes on, sinks like a rock. He pats his life vest in an attempt to find the inflation tabs on his vest. After a few frantic seconds, he feels one of the CO² cylinders. He finds the other CO² cylinder on the opposite side of his vest.

He follows down from the cylinders until finding the pull tabs. He pulls both tabs and the life vest inflates, rocketing him back to the surface.

COCKPIT

Balsey hears the loud SOUND of ESCAPING AIR as the life raft self inflates. He peers through the small opening in the cockpit door in an attempt to see what's going on.

With no way of getting past the life raft, Balsey dons his life vest and steps onto his seat. He opens the side window

and slides it rearward. Before exiting the aircraft, he removes his shoes then steps out the window.

The cockpit is still several feet above the water line. As he slides down the side of the fuselage, his left hand is cut by the stall vane transducer, a small metal device that protrudes from both sides of the nose.

Balsey grimaces in pain. He uses his good hand to inflate his life vest.

CABIN

Tobias manages to work himself free of the inflating life raft. He is about to exit through the forward galley door when something punctures the life raft. The raft quickly deflates.

Tobias doesn't see any passengers so he jumps into the water.

EXT. AIRCRAFT - DAY

Passengers are spread out all around the plane with the largest number on the right side, where several people remain standing on the right wing. The wing is nearly submerged.

BALSEY'S POV - Balsey examines the plane carefully and sees damage to the underside near the nose. He swims around to the main cabin door. He tries to reach the door handle, but the handle is beyond his reach.

He looks up at the door and sees that there is someone inside trying to open the door from the inside.

CABIN

The person Balsey sees trying to open the main cabin door is passenger Emerson Ussery. Emerson is fixated on the door handle. The deflated life raft floats in the water behind him.

There are also two bodies floating face down. Finally Emerson gives up on the door handle. He looks behind him and sees the open galley door.

Before exiting the plane, he returns to his seat to retrieve the suitcase with the \$350,000. But the suitcase is no longer there. It has floated away.

He looks around for the suitcase and notices a heavyset woman a few rows back. She appears stunned but uninjured.

EMERSON USSERY

Come on! You can get out this way!

Emerson turns and jumps out through the open galley door. The woman trips over something in the aisle and hits her head on an armrest. She tries to get up but collapses face down across a row of seats.

EXT. WATER - DAY

Balsey struggles onto the left wing. Once on the wing, he makes his way to the forward left emergency exit. He attempts to open the exit but has difficulty. He looks through the window and sees that a seatback is blocking the exit.

CABIN

Passenger JIM RAZZI is lying on the floor between a row of seats and partly in the aisle. The water is sloshing around his face.

He regains consciousness but is disoriented. He looks around and notices that he is in the front of the plane. He turns and heads toward the rear of the plane, calling for his wife.

JIM RAZZI

Hedi! Hedi!

Jim has to step over bodies and debris as he walks rearward. He also must walk uphill as the nose of the plane has sunk. He grabs onto seatbacks as he makes his way back toward row eight.

JIM RAZZI

Hedi!

The plane dips suddenly. The cockpit is now completely submerged and water rushes in through the opened cockpit window.

Jim turns to see a torrent of water rushing up the aisle toward him. The water nearly knocks him over. Finally the plane stabilizes, but now the water inside the cabin is waist-high.

Jim glances out the aft left emergency exit and sees a figure on the wing attempting to open the exit. A shaft of light illuminates the interior briefly as the plane rides the waves.

Jim notices the opened emergency exit on the opposite side of the aisle. He spots a woman standing by the exit. The woman is frozen in fear and unable to move further.

Jim comes up behind the woman and places his hand on her shoulder.

JIM RAZZI

It's going to be all right. We have to go through the exit. Do you understand?

The woman nods her head. The woman steps through the exit and Jim follows her onto the wing.

EXT./INT. AIRCRAFT - DAY

A DISTRESSED MALE PASSENGER appears at the emergency exit. The man scans the water around the plane before disappearing back inside the plane.

Balsey opens the aft left overwing emergency exit. It is dark and misty inside as Balsey steps into the cabin. He looks across the aisle and sees that the aft overwing exit on the opposite side of the aircraft has been opened.

One row up from the exit row he notices a man sitting in his seat. The man appears to be in shock. It is the same man who moments earlier had approached the emergency exit only to return to the cabin.

Sitting in the seat next to the man is a woman. The woman is dead with a broken neck.

BALSEY

Sir! Are you all right?

There is no response. Balsey wades over to the man and grabs him by the arm.

BALSEY

Come on. It's going to be okay.

Balsey assists the man to the overwing exit. He hears a DISTRESSED FEMALE PASSENGER calling out a name.

DISTRESSED FEMALE
PASSENGER

Julius!

The woman sees Balsey and calls out to him.

DISTRESSED FEMALE
PASSENGER

My husband. I can't find my
husband.

Balsey grabs the woman's arm and assists her to the left
overwing emergency exit.

BALSEY

I'll get your husband. You have to
get out now. There isn't much
time.

After assisting the woman through the exit, Balsey steps
back into the cabin. There is no movement. The only SOUND
is from the WATER SLOSHING around inside. The aircraft
lists heavily to the right.

BALSEY

Anybody here!

There is a NOISE behind him. Balsey turns to see that the
male passenger he had helped out of the aircraft minutes
earlier is now trying to reenter the plane.

Balsey blocks his path and steps through the exit and onto
the wing. He grabs the man and woman and jumps into the
water.

CABIN

The faint SOUND of METAL CREAKING can be heard as the plane
sinks further. It's dark inside. The water is nearly level
with the seatbacks.

In the front of the cabin there is movement. It is
passenger Jeannie Larmony, the elderly woman who was thrown
forward ten rows.

Jeannie sees a faint beam of light in the rear of the plane
and starts to climb over flattened seatbacks in an attempt
to reach the last remaining exit.

When she reaches it, there are only six or seven inches of the exit still above water. She tries to push through the exit but a wave forces her backwards.

On her next attempt, she clings to the sides of the exit with both hands and waits for the waves to subside. She succeeds on her next attempt.

INT. SAN JUAN CENTER - DAY

The supervisor leans in between controllers Alexander Sambolin and Charles Silvia. He stares at the radar scope.

SUPERVISOR

Where did you last have radar contact?

SILVIA

Right here.

Silvia points to an X he marked directly on the radar scope with a Magic Marker.

SUPERVISOR

(pointing)

Okay, looks like this guy right here is the closest aircraft. Give him a call and see if he's willing to help.

SILVIA

But he's at 24,000 feet.

SUPERVISOR

He's the closest. Go ahead and give him a call.

SILVIA

(into boom mike)

Pan Am 454, San Juan Center.

INT. COCKPIT OF PAN AM 454 - DAY

The crew of the 727 consists of CAPTAIN BILL PASH, FIRST OFFICER BILL HALL, and FLIGHT ENGINEER LARRY PHILLIPS.

CAPTAIN PASH

(to the first officer)

I'm going to start a modified emergency descent. Why don't you

make an announcement over the PA.
We don't want people panicking
back there.

FIRST OFFICER HALL

(over the PA)

Folks, from the flight deck. We
have a bit of an emergency going
on with another aircraft that has
been forced to ditch.

INT. CABIN OF 727 - DAY

The passengers listen intently as the first officer
explains what they are about to do next.

FIRST OFFICER HALL

(over the PA)

The captain has agreed to try and
locate the plane. So please bear
with us as we descend toward the
water.

EXT. WATER - DAY

A body floats face down in the water. The body is that of
the woman with the blue blouse with white polka-dots. She
is still without her life vest. She sinks below the water
and is not seen again.

Hugh Hart is bobbing up and down in the water when he hears
Harry Evans yelling from behind.

HARRY EVANS

Hugh, can you help me? I don't
have a life vest.

HUGH HART

I'll see if I can find you one,
Harry.

Hugh swims off toward the right wing. Harry is treading
water, but having a difficult time. The plane is now almost
completely submerged. All that remains above water is a
part of the tail and the horizontal stabilizer.

Harry swims toward the stabilizer. He passes directly over
the submerged fuselage. When he reaches the tail, he drapes
himself across the left elevator. It's a rough ride in the
heavy seas.

Harry spots something floating nearby. He leaves the elevator and heads toward what turns out to be a suitcase. When he looks back, the tail is just about to go beneath the water.

The V shaped tail looks very much like the tail of a whale that has just breached the surface.

There are two LOUD POPPING SOUNDS and the plane disappears beneath the water.

EXT. UNDERWATER - DAY

The plane's descent toward the bottom is eerie and peaceful all at the same time. Soon the entire plane is engulfed by darkness.

Looking towards the surface, the legs of passengers kicking frantically can be seen in all directions. Unidentified objects dot the water.

The outline of a larger object comes into view. In the low light and from below it looks very much like the outline of a large fish. The object takes aim at a pair of legs kicking in the water.

EXT. WATER - DAY

Hugh Hart is startled when something in the water brushes up against his leg. He stares down at the water trying to identify what it is. He soon realizes that what he is looking at is an escape chute.

He feels around for the inflation lanyard. When he finds it, he is unable to gain enough leverage to inflate the chute. Hugh spots a woman passenger nearby.

HUGH

Can you give me a hand?

The woman passenger swims closer. Hugh pushes the escape chute toward the woman.

HUGH

This is one of the escape slides from the plane. I'm going to try and inflate it. Just hold on while I swim away from you.

Hugh swims away from the woman and yanks on the lanyard. Seconds later a bright yellow escape chute inflates. The chute inflates upside down.

Passengers nearby start to swim toward the escape chute. There are only a few handholds. Hugh takes off his belt and wraps it around one of the handholds. He spots another male passenger holding on to another handhold.

HUGH

There aren't enough handholds. Use your belt or your tie and loop it around the ring.

The male passenger removes his tie and does as Hugh suggested. Other passengers quickly follow suit.

INT. HANGAR/OFFICE COAST GUARD AIR DETACHMENT UNIT

SUPER U.S. COAST GUARD AIR DETACHEMENT UNIT ISLA GRANDE AIRPORT, SAN JUAN PUERTO RICO

Coast Guard helicopter pilot BILL SHIELDS is at his desk working on paperwork. A loud AHHOOGA, AHHOOGA type alarm SOUNDS followed by the announcement "Man the ready helo, DC-9 ditching." Bill leaves immediately for the ramp.

EXT. HANGAR COAST GUARD AIR DETACHMENT UNIT

As Bill makes his way to the HH-52A Coast Guard helicopter, he is joined by his co-pilot CARMOND "FITZ" FITZGERALD and a READY CREWMAN. All three men are already dressed in orange NOMEX flight suits.

BILL SHIELDS

What do we have?

READY CREWMAN

A plane just ditched off the coast of St. Croix. No word on how many survivors.

BILL SHIELDS

Any ships nearby?

READY CREWMAN

A Coast Guard cutter out of St. Thomas. That's all I know. Tom Blank is headed to the scene in the HU-16.

BILL SHIELDS

What about the second helicopter?

READY CREWMAN

They're trying to find a crew for it right now.

BILL SHIELDS

Okay, let's get her fired up. We can get briefed en route.

INT. ROOM AT THE BACHELOR'S OFFICERS QUARTERS ROOSEVELT
ROADS NAVAL STATION

SUPER BACHELOR'S OFFICERS QUARTERS ROOSEVELT ROADS NAVAL
STATION, PUERTO RICO

Lieutenant DONALD HARTMAN enters the room holding something behind his back. His GIRLFRIEND sits at the edge of the bed. A large suitcase sits nearby. Several glass sculptures adorn the room.

DON HARTMAN

I got something for you.

GIRLFRIEND

What?

Don takes his arms from behind his back and reveals a glass dolphin on a stand.

GIRLFRIEND

You made that? It's beautiful. But how am I going to get it back without breaking it?

DON HARTMAN

Don't worry. I'll have it shipped.

GIRLFRIEND

I wish I could stay another day.

DON HARTMAN

You don't have to be at the airport for another four hours.

Don kisses his girlfriend. They fall back against the bed. Don starts to unbutton her blouse when the phone rings.

GIRLFRIEND

Don't answer that.

Don starts to get up. But his girlfriend pulls him toward her.

DON HARTMAN

I'm on call. I have to get it.

Don picks up the handset.

DON HARTMAN (INTO PHONE)

Hello...Yeah...What? A DC-9? No, the H-34 is too small. We're gonna need the Sea King. I better call Rylee.

INT. HOME OF LIEUTENANT COMMANDER JIM RYLEE - DAY

Jim is napping in his chair when the phone rings. A Spanish language station drones on in the background. His wife Donna picks up the phone.

DONNA RYLEE

Jim, it's for you.

Jim doesn't answer.

DONNA RYLEE

Jim! The phone. It's for you.

Jim Rylee wakes and rubs his eyes.

JIM RYLEE

Who is it?

DONNA RYLEE

It's Don Hartman. He says it's important.

Jim gets out of his chair and ambles over to take the phone from his wife.

JIM RYLEE

(into the handset)

Hello...A DC-9? Yeah...I agree. Call the hangar and tell them to get it fueled and ready. I'll be there as soon as I can.

EXT. WATER - DAY

A dozen people are now gathered around the escape slide. Among those around the escape slide are Balsey and Harry.

Harry is still without a life vest. He climbs aboard the escape chute and remains kneeling.

A FEMALE PASSENGER attends to injured passenger Jeannie Larmony. Jeannie is wearing a life vest, but it is not inflated.

FEMALE PASSENGER

(to Harry)

This woman is injured. Do you have room for her?

Harry, looks down the length of the slide. There is barely enough room for three or four adults.

HARRY

Yeah, there's room. Balsey, can you give me a hand?

Balsey climbs aboard the escape chute and together they pull Jeannie Larmony onto the slide. Balsey then slips back into the water. Jeannie lies prone on the slide, her legs dangle off the edge.

INT. COCKPIT PAN AM 454 - DAY

The 727 breaks out of the overcast 500 feet above the surface. There is no sight of the DC-9. All three crewmen scan the water.

CAPTAIN PASH

Give me flaps fifteen. Tell Center that we're coming around to a 180 degree heading.

EXT. WATER - DAY

Steward Tobias Cordeiro is in the water near the escape slide. He scans the horizon looking for ships but sees none.

TOBIAS

(to Harry)

How far are we from land?

HARRY

About thirty-five miles.

TOBIAS

How long do you think it will take to get a boat here?

HARRY

I don't know. A couple of hours at least.

An UNIDENTIFIED PASSENGER spots the 727 off in the distance.

UNIDENTIFIED PASSENGER

Look! Over there!

INT. COCKPIT PAM AM 454 - DAY

The three men in the cockpit scan the waters below. Flight Engineer Larry Phillips is the first to spot something.

LARRY PHILLIPS

(pointing)

Look over there about ten o'clock.

All three men see an oil strip about three hundred meters long. Captain Pash follows the oil strip until he comes upon the scene.

FIRST OFFICER HALL

There they are.

CAPTAIN PASH

Jeez! Would you look at that. The plane must have broken apart as soon as it hit the water.

INT. CABIN PAN AM 454 - DAY

There are only twenty passengers on board the 727, but all eyes are outside. When one passenger finally spots the accident scene, everyone jockeys for a better position.

The passengers are shocked and frightened by what they see, but none of them turn away from the windows.

EXT. WATER - DAY

The 727 passes over the escape slide and rocks its wings. A few people wave as it thunders by.

INT. COCKPIT PAN AM 454 - DAY

The plane makes a steep left turn.

CAPTAIN PASH

(to the first
officer)

Tell San Juan to stand by and
we'll let them know when we're
directly over the crash scene.

Captain Pash lines the plane up on the escape slide where
the largest group of survivors are located. He passes
directly over the slide.

FIRST OFFICER HALL

(into boom mike)

Okay, San Juan, mark. And just so
you know, the seas are pretty
rough out here where the plane
went down.

EXT. DECK OF THE GUALDALCANAL - DAY

A CH-46 Sea Knight helicopter has just landed. In the back
of the helicopter are Lance Corporal Bill Schrader and
SERGEANT BLANKENSHIP.

Sergeant Blankenship goes to the cockpit to talk to the two
pilots CAPTAIN GLEN WARREN and CAPTAIN NED LEMOINE. Bill
waits patiently for the verdict.

SERGEANT BLANKENSHIP

(extending his hand
to Bill Schrader)

Congratulations! I think you'll
make a hell of a crew chief.

BILL SCHRADER

Thanks.

The two pilots unbuckle their seatbelts and head to the
back to offer their congratulations to the newest member of
the crew.

CAPTAIN LEMOINE

Congratulations, Bill. Looking
forward to working with you.

CAPTAIN WARREN

Good job, man. Welcome to the
crew. Can you put her to bed for
us?

BILL SCHRADER

Sure thing.

The two pilots and sergeant Blankenship exit through the gunner's door. Schrader grabs the protective covers from a storage bin. He exits the helicopter and begins putting protective covers on the pitot tubes and the engine inlets.

He notices a flurry of activity on the flight deck. Two CH-46s are in the process of being hot fueled (fueled with the rotors still turning). He spots a NAVY CORPSMAN and stops him.

BILL SCHRADER

What's going on?

NAVY CORPSMAN

An airliner just ditched. We're going out there to help in the rescue. I gotta go. I don't wanna miss this.

The navy corpsman runs off and climbs aboard one of the two helicopters just before it departs. Two more helicopters depart shortly after the first two.

Bill removes the protective covers he had just put on. The two pilots, Glen Warren and Ned Lemoine, run toward the helicopter.

CAPTAIN WARREN

Did you hear about the airliner?

BILL SCHRADER

Yeah.

CAPTAIN WARREN

Are we ready to fly?

BILL SCHRADER

We haven't been fueled.

Captain Ned Lemoine jumps into the cockpit and turns the master switch on.

CAPTAIN LEMOINE

We've got about ninety minutes of fuel.

CAPTAIN WARREN

We'll have to go with that. We don't have time to fuel. Let's get her fired up.

Glenn Warren enters the helicopter through the opened gunner's door. He looks back and notices that Bill Schrader is still standing on the flight deck.

CAPTAIN WARREN

(to Bill Schrader)

What's wrong?

BILL SCHRADER

Are you sure you don't want to get someone with a little more experience?

GLENN WARREN

You passed your checkride didn't you?

BILL SCHRADER

Yeah, but...

Glenn exits the helicopter and walks up to Bill.

GLENN WARREN

If I didn't think you could do the job, I would have said something.

BILL SCHRADER

All right, let's go.

Just as Schrader is about to close the gunner's door two more marines approach.

MARINE

Got room for two more?

BILL SCHRADER

Come on.

EXT. WATER - DAY

Passenger Rick Arnold is clinging to a suitcase. He looks around and spots people gathered around some kind of flotation device.

He swims in that direction. As he approaches the slide he sees Loretta Gremelsbacker floating nearby.

RICK ARNOLD

Loretta, are you all right?

LORETTA GREMELSBACKER

I can't find Gene.

RICK ARNOLD

I'm sure he's okay.

LORETTA GREMELSBACKER

(in tears)

He's gone, Rick. I just know it.

Rick surveys the water around him. There is no sign of Loretta's husband, Gene. Rick swims closer to Loretta.

RICK

Listen, Gene can take care of himself. Are you okay?

LORETTA

I don't have any feeling in my legs.

Rick wraps an arm around Loretta and tugs her toward the escape slide.

RICK

Help is coming. They know where we are now. Just hang on.

INT. OFFICE OF BILL BOHLKE'S FLYING SCHOOL - DAY

Flight instructor George Johnson and student pilot Andy Titus sit across from Bill Bohlke.

GEORGE JOHNSON

(to Bill Bohlke)

So how long you think you'll be out on furlough this time around?

BILL BOHLKE

A year, maybe more.

ANDY TITUS

Yeah, but at some point they're gonna have to call you back. And you'll be flying for the airlines

again. I'd do anything for a job like that.

BILL BOHLKE

I have to admit; the job does have its perks.

ANDY TITUS

What about the stewardesses? It's gotta be like a kid in a candy store.

BILL BOHLKE

Andy, you have a one track mind.

ANDY TITUS

Come on, man. They're all gorgeous. I like Tuddy and all, but haven't you -

Andy is interrupted mid sentence when an excited AIRPORT EMPLOYEE bursts into the office.

AIRPORT EMPLOYEE

Did you guys hear about the DC-9?

BILL BOHLKE

What DC-9?

AIRPORT EMPLOYEE

A DC-9 just ditched about thirty-five miles from here.

BILL BOHLKE

What?

AIRPORT EMPLOYEE

It ran out of fuel and had to ditch. I was just in the control tower. I heard the whole thing.

BILL BOHLKE

Who's working the tower?

AIRPORT EMPLOYEE

Don Bishop.

BILL BOHLKE

(to George Johnson)

I'm going up to the tower to get some more information. Do me a

favor and tell George Stoute to grab the twenty-man life raft from storage.

GEORGE JOHNSON

Are you thinking about flying out there?

BILL BOHLKE

We can take the Skyvan. The rear cargo door can be opened in flight. Maybe we can drop some life rafts.

GEORGE JOHNSON

I thought the Skyvan was loaded up for the laundry run on Monday.

BILL BOHLKE

You're right. We'll have to unload it. There's some empty cargo carts outside by the hangar. Grab those and start unloading. I'll be back as soon as I can.

EXT. ST CROIX AIRPORT IN FRONT OF BILL BOHLKE'S FLIGHT SCHOOL - DAY

Three cargo carts overflowing with dirty laundry sit behind the Skyvan. Bill Bohlke and George Stoute toss the twenty-man life raft into the back of the Skyvan.

They are just about to close the rear cargo door when another pilot, PAUL WIKANDER, approaches the plane.

PAUL WIKANDER

Hey, I just heard what happened. Mind if I come along?

BILL BOHLKE

If you don't mind sitting on the floor.

EXT. WATER - DAY

Passengers Emerson Ussery and Vivian Rosotto cling to an aircraft tire. They are approached by passengers Arthur and Sybil Johnson.

ARTHUR JOHNSON

Mind if we join you?

EMERSON USSERY

Not at all. Grab a wheel.

Arthur and his wife swim over and grab onto the tire. All four paddle toward the escape slide.

ARTHUR JOHNSON

Did this come off the plane?

EMERSON USSERY

I don't think so. Must have been a spare in the cargo compartment.

Their conversation is interrupted by a low flying aircraft.

VIVIAN ROSOTTO

Look! There's another plane!

The Skyvan drops below the overcast.

INT. COCKPIT OF THE SKYVAN - DAY

Bill spots the survivors and banks hard to the left to keep them in view.

BILL BOHLKE

(to the men in back)

I want to drop the four man raft first. I want to get a good read on the drift.

INT. CABIN OF THE SKYVAN - DAY

The rear cargo door has been opened. George Stoute and Paul Wikander have each tied Aeroquip straps (long rubber like straps used to tie down cargo) around their waists.

They are lying on the floor near the opened door. It's noisy and windy inside.

Andy Titus pushes the four man raft towards George Stoute and Paul Wikander. Paul ties an Aeroquip strap to the inflation lanyard and then signals that they're ready.

ANDY TITUS

(to Bill)

Okay, they're ready.

BILL BOHLKE

Standby to drop.

EXT. WATER - DAY

Balsey watches the Skyvan as it passes directly overhead and drops a life raft. The raft falls upwind of the escape slide. The raft only partially inflates.

BALSEY

(to Harry)

Harry, I'm going after the life raft. Can you handle things here?

HARRY

Yes.

Balsey leaves the slide and starts swimming towards the life raft using a modified breast stroke. He doesn't get far before he is joined by Hugh Hart.

HUGH

Balsey, I'm coming with you.

BALSEY

Okay, Hugh.

INT. CABIN SKYVAN - DAY

Andy Titus pushes the second life raft toward George Stoute and Paul Wikander.

EXT. WATER - DAY

The Skyvan makes a second pass. When the next raft falls from the plane it inflates fifty feet above the water. The raft is caught by the strong winds and is blown downwind about thirty yards.

BALSEY

Hugh, you go on. I'm going to try for the second raft.

HUGH

Are you crazy? You'll never reach it the way it's blowin'.

BALSEY

Hugh, we need a raft. If I don't come back, I don't come back. At least we'll have a better chance of getting a raft than if we both go after the same one.

After some effort, Hugh reaches the life raft only to discover that it has completely deflated. He searches the raft for the survival pouch.

Once he finds the pouch he rummages through its contents until he finds a hand-held air pump. The pump looks like a miniature version of a bicycle air pump.

Hugh turns the raft around until finding the air valve. He threads the connector to the air valve then starts pumping.

Balsey is closing in on the second raft, but every time he gets close enough to grab it a wave comes along and the raft is carried farther away. Finally, Balsey lunges for the raft and manages to grab hold of it.

He clambers aboard the twenty-man life raft, nearly collapsing from the effort. The combination of the fatigue and the salt water in his stomach makes him queasy. He leans over the side and vomits.

Balsey finds the survival pouch hanging from the side of the raft and begins to rummage through its contents. He finds two smoke flares. He grabs one and removes the cap, but nothing happens. It's a dud. He tosses it into the water.

He pulls the cap on the second flare; the puff of orange smoke it expels is barely visible. He throws the flare overboard.

He turns his attention back to the survival pouch to see what other items it contains when he hears the SOUND of a plane pass overhead.

He looks skyward and spots the Coast Guard HU-16 amphibious aircraft.

INT. COCKPIT OF A COAST GUARD HU-16 - DAY

Pilot LIEUTENANT TOM BLANK is at the controls of the Coast Guard HU-16. Also in the cockpit is a co-pilot and radio operator. In the back of the plane is a DROP MASTER.

TOM BLANK

(over the ICS)

I want to drop the beacon first
then the two life rafts.

DROP MASTER

(over the ICS)

Okay, I'm all set back here.

EXT. WATER - DAY

Passenger Rick Arnold is clinging to a tether line made up of a belt and a tie. He is also holding on to Loretta Gremelsbacker. Loretta is barely conscious.

Rick looks skyward as the Coast Guard aircraft passes overhead and tosses a bright orange object from the plane. The Coast Guard plane makes a wide turn and drops a second, much larger object, far from the survivors.

MALE PASSENGER

This is not looking good. They've known our position for an hour now and I haven't seen a single rescue ship. The seas are too rough.

RICK

That was a Coast Guard plane that just flew overhead. I'm sure they know what they're doing.

MALE PASSENGER

Then why no boats? I'm telling you the weather's too bad. It will be dark soon. If we have to spend the night in the water, there won't be anyone left to rescue. The sharks will get us.

Rick swims closer to the man. He reaches out and grabs him by the shoulder.

RICK

Look, you keep talking that way and scaring everyone and you won't have to worry about any sharks.

EXT. FOUR MARINE HELICOPTERS FLY IN A RIGHT ECHELON FORMATION TWO HUNDRED FEET ABOVE A ROUGH SEA - DAY

INT. COCKPIT OF HELICOPTER EM-13 - DAY

Pilots Art Nash and Bill Murphy scan the waters ahead looking for the accident scene. Captain RANDY LOGAN stands

in the back of the helicopter looking out through the cockpit window. The lead helicopter is in view.

ART NASH

(over the ICS)

We don't have the fuel to be flying around in circles like this.

INT. DINING ROOM OF STEEDMAN'S PARENTS HOUSE IN VIRGINIA - DAY

Steedman, Ingrid, and their daughter Annalisa are sitting at the dinner table. Steedman's parents are also at the table. Ingrid is feeding one-year-old Annalisa.

STEEDMAN'S MOTHER

Would anyone care for some desert?

STEEDMAN

I'll just have some coffee.

STEEDMAN'S MOTHER

Ingrid?

INGRID

Sure. Thanks.

The conversation is interrupted by a phone call. Steedman's mother answers the phone in another room.

STEEEDMAN'S MOTHER

Steedman, it's for you.

Steedman excuses himself from the table to take the phone call.

STEEDMAN

Hello...

Steedman's demeanor becomes serious and somber as he receives the news about the crash. His silence on the phone draws Ingrid and his parents into the room.

STEEDMAN

Any fatalities? Okay, I'll be there as soon as I can.

STEEDMAN'S FATHER

What happened?

STEEDMAN

There's been an accident. One of our planes has had to make an emergency water landing.

(to his mother)

I'm sorry, but I have to get back to New York.

STEEDMAN'S FATHER

Go ahead and get your things. I'll get the car ready.

EXT. WATER - DAY

Balsey is rummaging through the survival pouch when he hears the SOUND of a helicopter. He looks upward and notices the Navy helicopter hovering directly overhead. A crewman lowers a rescue seat.

INT. COCKPIT OF COAST GUARD HELICOPTER 1463 - DAY

Pilots Lieutenant Bill Shields and Lieutenant Carmond (Fitz) Fitzgerald scan the rough water below in search of the accident scene.

FITZ

(over the ICS)

We have to be getting close.

Lieutenant Shields spots the Navy helicopter off in the distance.

BILL SHIELDS

(over the ICS)

There they are.

Both men spot the Navy helicopter in the distance as it hoists a survivor. The survivor is Balsey.

BILL SHIELDS

(over the ICS)

I'm gonna fly downwind and work our way back from there.

EXT. WATER - DAY

Wilfred Spencer is alone in the water when he spots the life raft dropped from the HU-16. The raft has stopped cart wheeling, but it is a good distance away. Wilfred starts to swim toward the raft.

EXT. UNDERWATER - DAY

As viewed from below the surface, Wilfred kicks his legs laboriously as he swims toward the life raft. Making little progress, he kicks off his shoes and removes his pants. Once he accomplishes this, his legs move more easily.

EXT. WATER - DAY

Wilfred is focused on reaching the life raft, which by now is barely visible, when a Coast Guard helicopter appears overhead.

Wilfred climbs into a lowered rescue basket and is raised from the water.

INT./EXT. EM-13 MARINE HELICOPTER - DAY

COCKPIT

Pilot's Art Nash and Bill Murphy fly close behind helicopter EM-15. They are flying only a few hundred feet above a rough sea.

The lead helicopter banks hard to the left and Art Nash follows in formation.

CABIN

John Barber notices the abrupt change in course.

JOHN BARBER

(over the ICS)

What's going on?

ART NASH

(over the ICS)

We're heading to St. Croix. Looks like the Coasties want the rescue all to themselves.

EXT. WATER - DAY

Navigator Hugh Hart sits atop a partially inflated life raft. He is pumping air into the raft with the air pump when he spots the Coast Guard helicopter approaching overhead.

EXT. THE ESCAPE SLIDE - DAY

The scene as viewed from the escape slide is chaotic. Two aircraft - the Coast Guard HU-16 and the Skyvan - are

circling overhead. Two helicopters - one Coast Guard helicopter and a Navy SH-3A helicopter - are performing rescues.

A second Coast Guard helicopter is approaching. Debris and other survivors surround the escape slide.

The Coast Guard helicopter piloted by Bill Shields hovers over the escape slide and drops the rescue basket near the slide.

RICK ARNOLD

(referring to
Loretta)

This woman is injured.

HARRY EVANS

Okay, she goes first.

Rick and another passenger assist Loretta into the basket.

INT. COCKPIT/CABIN COAST GUARD HELICOPTER 1463 - DAY

Loretta is raised to the opened door of the helicopter. Once the ready crewman swings the basket inside, Wilfred Spencer and Hugh Hart assist in removing her from the basket and placing her on the floor.

READY CREWMAN

(over the ICS)

She's in.

CARMOND FITZGERALD

(over the ICS)

We've got maybe thirty minutes of fuel remaining.

BILL SHIELDS

(over the iCS)

Okay. Start picking up two at a time.

The ready crewman hangs out the opened door and signals to the survivors gathered around the escape slide that he wants two people in the basket. When he lowers the basket, two very large men swim toward it and get inside.

EXT. ESCAPE SLIDE - DAY

Rick Arnold watches the two men swim toward the rescue basket.

RICK ARNOLD

So much for women first.

INT. COCKPIT/CABIN COAST GUARD HELICOPTER 1463 - DAY

The ready crewman activates the hoist, but the basket doesn't get very far before the hoist bogs down.

A CLOSEUP of the hoist cable shows that it has started to unravel near the hoist mechanism due to excessive weight.

READY CREWMAN

(over the ICS)

We've got a problem. The hoist is jammed! It won't go up any further!

BILL SHIELDS

(over the ICS)

Try reversing it.

The ready crewman tries to reverse the hoist but is unsuccessful.

READY CREWMAN

(over the ICS)

It's not budging.

BILL SHIELDS

(over the ICS)

We're gonna have to sever it.

EXT. ESCAPE SLIDE - DAY

All eyes are glued to the rescue basket as it sways beneath the Coast Guard helicopter with the two men inside. Suddenly the cable snaps and the rescue basket drops from a height of about ten feet.

A BALDING PASSENGER in his late fifties believes that the cable has just snapped due to excessive weight.

BALDING PASSENGER

Serves 'em right.

The Coast Guard helicopter departs the scene.

INT. COCKPIT/CABIN NAVY SH-3A HELICOPTER - DAY

The Navy helicopter moves in as soon as the Coast Guard helicopter departs.

Lindley lowers the rescue sling toward the man in uniform (Harry Evans) sitting atop the escape slide, but the strong winds play havoc with the sling.

CV LINDLEY

(over the ICS)

It's blowin' pretty hard. Can you bring it down any lower?

EXT. ESCAPE SLIDE - DAY

The Navy helicopter hovers only a few feet above the huge waves. The windy conditions are compounded by the swirling winds from the helicopter's rotor blades, sending debris flying.

The lower hover altitude makes it easier for Harry Evans to grab onto the rescue sling. Harry offers the sling to a passenger who drapes herself across the bottom of the sling.

The woman hangs from the sling like a rag doll as she is hoisted into the helicopter. Seconds later the sling is lowered again and Harry offers it to another passenger.

INT. COCKPIT/CABIN NAVY SH-3A HELICOPTER - DAY

Survivors are being hoisted into the Navy helicopter so fast that they are like freshly caught fish being dragged aboard a fishing boat.

Balsey, who up until this point has been sitting alone lost in thought, jumps into action. He helps Bill Brazzell by finding a spot on the floor for each survivor as they are brought inside the helicopter.

It doesn't take long before every square inch of the passenger compartment is occupied by a survivor.

CV LINDLEY

(over the ICS)

I think we have about as many as we can hold.

JIM RYLEE

(over the ICS)

Do a head count.

Lindley starts counting heads.

CV LINDLEY

(over the ICS)

Looks like we have twenty-six.

PILOTS POV - Jim Rylee and Donald Hartman take a quick glance behind them. Wet and bloodied survivors litter the cabin.

EXT. ST. CROIX AIRPORT - DUSK

SUPER ST. CROIX AIRPORT U.S. VIRGIN ISLANDS

The four Marine helicopters approach the airport and set down on the tarmac. A crowd has started to form. Two ambulances sit on the tarmac, their lights flashing.

A row of army stretchers are laid out in the grass. People in medical garb stand nearby.

Helicopter EM-13 lands and pilot Art Nash exits the helicopter. Art approaches a dark skinned man dressed in a suit. The man is GOVERNOR MELVIN EVANS.

ART NASH

Who's in charge here?

MELVIN EVANS

I guess I am. I'm Governor Evans. I was on a plane about to depart for St. Thomas when I heard about the accident.

ART NASH

Have you been in contact with the Coast Guard?

MELVIN EVANS

Yes. A Coast Guard helicopter is en route with survivors.

ART NASH

Thanks.

INT. COCKPIT/CABIN NAVY SH-3A HELICOPTER - DUSK

There are so many survivors crammed into the back of the helicopter that CV Lindley and Bill Brazzell are forced to stand.

Balsey surveys the passengers who hours earlier had been sitting comfortably in their seats. They now sit on the

floor wet and shoeless, their clothes bloodied. Most of them are still wearing their inflated life vests.

An OLDER FEMALE PASSENGER in a soaked dress glances up at Balsey. She doesn't appear to have any obvious injuries.

OLDER FEMALE PASSENGER

Are you the captain?

BALSEY

Yes, ma'am. I'm the captain.

A number of the survivors glance up at the man who is most responsible for what has just happened.

OLDER FEMALE PASSENGER

You did a fine job putting that plane down. Thank you.

Balsey accepts the compliment but doesn't acknowledge it with anything more than a nod.

EXT. ESCAPE SLIDE - DUSK

The second Coast Guard helicopter is in the process of hoisting up a passenger from the escape slide. Three people remain in the water around the slide and Harry Evans remains kneeling on the slide.

Once the passenger being hoisted is brought into the helicopter, the crewman working the hoist leans out the door and signals that there is room for just one more survivor.

TOBIAS CORDEIRO

(to Rick Arnold)

Go ahead. You're next.

RICK ARNOLD

You go. I feel fine. I'll wait for the next one.

Tobias glances at the second man in the water around the slide, passenger GEORGE KELLNER.

GEORGE KELLNER

I can wait.

Tobias swims off and climbs into the rescue basket. Once he is safely inside, the helicopter departs the scene.

RICK ARNOLD

(to Harry Evans)

I don't see anyone else. Maybe we should climb aboard.

HARRY EVANS

Yeah, it might be a while before they come back. I think it's okay now.

Harry assists Rick Arnold on to the slide. The two of them then help passenger George Kellner on to the slide.

GEORGE KELLNER

I sure hope they make it back before it gets dark. I wouldn't want to have to spend the night out here on this thing.

EXT. ST CROIX AIRPORT - DUSK

The Coast Guard helicopter lands and two women survivors are whisked away in an ambulance. An emergency medical technician approaches Hugh Hart and Wilfred Spencer.

Neither of them have injuries serious enough to require immediate medical attention. They both wave off the EMT.

Governor Evans sees the two crewmembers and waves to an airport RAMP EMPLOYEE.

GOVERNOR EVANS

(to the ramp
employee)

Take the crewmembers inside. And spread the word that the crewmembers are to be kept separate from the passengers.

A photographer lights up the ramp with his flash bulb as he snaps pictures of Hugh and Wilfred. The ramp employee reaches Hugh first.

RAMP EMPLOYEE

They want you inside. You can wait upstairs in the Eastern Airlines VIP room.

The ramp employee points Hugh in the right direction then heads toward Wilfred Spencer.

RAMP EMPLOYEE

Come with me. I might have a pair of work pants that I can give you.

WILFRED SPENCER

Of all days to have a hole in my underwear.

As the rotor blades wind down on the Coast Guard helicopter, several of the Marine pilots approach. One of the pilots is Captain Glen Warren.

GLEN WARREN

(to Lieutenant Bill Shields)

Are there more survivors?

BILL SHIELDS

Yes. I'm not sure how many. Are you guys ready to go?

GLEN WARREN

We're ready.

BILL SHIELDS

We've got a problem with our hoist system. You better get going before it gets dark. They're about thirty-five miles out on the 080 degree radial off of St. Croix.

The Marine pilots disperse and head for their respective helicopters. Glen Warren approaches his helicopter, EM-07. Bill Schrader is standing near the helicopter.

GLEN WARREN

We're cleared to launch.

BILL SCHRADER

But we haven't been fueled yet.

GLEN WARREN

We'll have to go with what we have. We don't have time to wait.

INT. NAVY SH-3A HELICOPTER - DUSK

As the Navy helicopter approaches St. Croix, a few of the passengers glance out the windows. What they see is a crowded ramp of people, vehicles, and flashing lights.

One passenger deflates his life vest and removes it. This starts a chain reaction of passengers deflating and removing their life vests.

An ATTRACTIVE FEMALE PASSENGER wearing a tropical print dress with spaghetti straps looks up at Bill Brazzell.

ATTRACTIVE FEMALE
PASSENGER

Do you do this a lot?

BILL BRAZZELL

What's that?

ATTRACTIVE FEMALE
PASSENGER

You know, rescue people.

BILL BRAZZELL

No ma'am. Our primary mission at Roosevelt Roads is target drone recovery. This is our first rescue.

The comment gets the attention of everyone who overhears it.

EXT. ST CROIX AIRPORT - DUSK

The Navy helicopter comes to a stop in front of the main passenger terminal. Passengers start streaming out as soon as the door opens.

A line of civilian passenger vehicles wait to transport the survivors to the hospital.

INT. NAVY SH-3A HELICOPTER - DUSK

Balsey is the last passenger inside the helicopter as the two pilots complete their shutdown checklists. When they unbuckle themselves and turn to exit, Balsey is waiting for them. He extends his hand.

BALSEY

You guys did a hell of a job.
Thank you.

INT. MARINE HELICOPTER EM-13 - DUSK

The light is fading fast as the Marine helicopters approach the accident scene.

BILL MURPHY

(over the ICS)

There they are.

Bill points off to the right where the pulsating anti-collision lights of the two helicopters that had departed before them light up the misty atmosphere of cloud, water, and spray.

ART NASH

(over the ICS)

Okay, keep your eyes open. We're coming up on the crash scene.

Hearing this, John Barber opens up the hell hole in the bottom of the helicopter and peers down at the water while lying flat on his stomach.

JOHN BARBER'S POV - John sees nothing but dark water and waves. As the helicopter proceeds further, John starts to see debris in the water.

ART NASH

(over the ICS)

I've got someone straight ahead. You should see him in a few seconds.

John sees the man, but the man doesn't appear to be conscious.

JOHN BARBER

(over the ICS)

I've got him. He's not moving.

ART NASH

(over the ICS)

Anyone back there want to go in after him?

RANDY LOGAN

I'll go.

EXT. MARINE HELICOPTER EM-13 - DUSK

Randy Logan, dressed in a flight suit and wearing a Mae West life preserver, is lowered to the water by a rescue sling.

Once in the water, Randy gets out of the sling and swims toward the unconscious man. He puts the sling around the man and gives John Barber the signal to hoist the man up.

INT. MARINE HELICOPTER EM-13 - DUSK

John Barber operates the hoist control through a pistol grip connected to a long cord. He backs away from the hell hole as the man nears the opening. The rescued man is very large and has stripped down to his underwear.

The man is left dangling in the center of the helicopter, his feet barely clear the hell hole. John lets out some slack in the hoist cable and with one hand pushes him toward another marine who grabs him and pulls him inside.

The marine removes the man's life vest and immediately starts performing CPR. Barber meanwhile turns his attention to retrieving Randy Logan, who by now is barely visible in the dwindling light.

INT. MARINE HELICOPTER EM-07 - DUSK

Bill Schrader is lying on his stomach looking straight down at the water through the opened hell hole. He is trying to get the rescue sling to one of the men on the escape slide, but the strong winds and huge waves are making it a difficult task.

GLEN WARREN

(over the ICS)

How're we doing, Billy? We don't have much fuel left.

BILL SCHRADER

It's pretty nasty down there. Can you get any lower?

BILL'S POV - The helicopter is only a few feet above the waves.

BILL SCHRADER

(over the ICS)

You need to come to your left a little.

EXT. ESCAPE SLIDE - DUSK

Harry Evans reaches but is unable to grab onto the rescue sling. Finally, after several attempts he manages to get a

hand on the swaying sling. Passenger Rick Arnold is first to be hoisted up.

INT. MARINE HELICOPTER EM-07 - DUSK

Rick is pulled inside. He begins shivering uncontrollably.

RICK

Man, am I glad to see you guys. I don't know how much longer we could have lasted out there.

A CREWMAN wraps Rick in a blanket.

CREWMAN

You can buy us a bear later.

RICK

You got it. Anything you guys want.

Rick sits to the side as passenger George Kellner is brought inside the helicopter.

George also starts to shiver uncontrollably. A navy corpsman removes his jacket and wraps it around George. He then lights up a cigarette and offers it to him.

GEORGE KELLNER

I stopped smoking a few months ago.

The navy corpsman starts to move away.

GEORGE KELLNER

Wait a second. I could really use a smoke right now. Thanks.

George puffs on the cigarette as the crewmen turn their attention to the last remaining person on the slide.

NED LEMOINE

(over the ICS)

Five minutes to bingo fuel.

GLENN WARREN

(over the ICS)

Talk to me, Billy. We're not leaving until we get 'em all.

Bill lowers the rescue sling and once again it is blown in the strong winds.

BILL SCHRADER

(over the ICS)

Come straight back about thirty yards.

Glenn hovers backwards. This time the sling is blown toward Harry instead of away from him.

BILL SCHRADER

(over the ICS)

We got 'em!

EXT. ST. CROIX AIRPORT - DUSK

Balsey has exited the Navy helicopter and is wandering the ramp aimlessly as survivors are loaded into waiting civilian vehicles. He is approached by a ramp employee.

RAMP EMPLOYEE

Are you one of the crewmembers?

BALSEY

I'm the captain.

RAMP EMPLOYEE

Do you need to go to the hospital?

BALSEY

No. I'm fine. Just a cut on my hand. I'll be all right.

RAMP EMPLOYEE

Follow me. The other crewmembers are inside.

Balsey grabs the ramp employee by the arm.

BALSEY

There were children on board. Two little girls about three or four years old. Have you seen them?

RAMP EMPLOYEE

No. But there's a lot going on. I could have missed them.

BALSEY

But they would have been the first to be rescued.

(beat)

Look, would it be possible to see a priest? I don't care what faith.

RAMP EMPLOYEE

Sure. I'll see what I can do.

INT. CIVILIAN VEHICLE - DUSK

Passenger Jeannie Larmony lies on her side in the back of a beat up car. She is being jostled around as the car swerves at high speed on the narrow road.

The DRIVER is a dark-skinned man in his twenties. He speaks with an accent. The DRIVER'S FRIEND is in the front passenger seat.

DRIVER'S FRIEND

(makes eye contact with Jeannie)

Welcome to St. Croix. We take good care of you.

JEANNIE

Where are you taking me?

DRIVER'S FRIEND

We're taking you to the hospital in Christianstead.

The car slows as it approaches a long line of vehicles. An ambulance can be seen several cars ahead. The lights are flashing but the cars in front of the ambulance are not giving way.

DRIVER

Look at those fools. They have no idea what's going on.

EXT. ST. CROIX AIRPORT - NIGHT

The pilots of the two Coast Guard helicopters meet to discuss their options. The two pilots of the second Coast Guard helicopter are Lieutenant Commander JIM BRAWLEY and Captain CHARLES MAYES.

CHARLES MAYES

(to Bill Shields)

We have a new hoist and basket coming in from San Juan. But it's going to take several hours to get you going again.

BILL SHIELDS

We'll go without it. We can still help with the search. If we don't get those people tonight the sharks will.

JIM BRAWLEY

He's right. The more eyes we have out there the better.

CHARLES MAYES

Okay, we launch as soon as the HU-16 gets here. In the mean time, let's get some fuel. It's going to be a long night.

INT. EASTERN AIRLINES VIP ROOM ST. CROIX AIRPORT - NIGHT

Balsey is led into the room by the ramp employee. Hugh Hart is already in the room. Hugh is looking out a window that looks out on to the ramp. Balsey thanks the ramp employee then walks over to Hugh.

BALSEY

Have you seen Harry?

HUGH

I haven't seen him since we left the escape slide.

BALSEY

What about Margareth and the two stewards?

HUGH

I was in the helicopter with Spencer. I don't know about the other two. Do you think we lost anyone?

BALSEY

I'm afraid so.

Hugh heads for a chair. He has a noticeable limp as he crosses the room.

BALSEY

Are you okay?

HUGH

My knee is a little sore. I think I got hit by a coffee maker. Damn thing felt like a lead pipe.

BALSEY

You should have it looked at.

Hugh rubs his sore knee.

HUGH

I'm okay. It's a little swollen, but I'm sure it's not broken.

(beat)

You know, this was supposed to be my day off. You should have heard scheduling when they called.

(mocking imitation)

Hugh, you're our last resort. We can't get a hold of anyone else. Made it sound like the whole airline was resting on my shoulders.

BALSEY

I for one am glad you said yes.

HUGH

Thanks. Have you called your wife?

BALSEY

Not yet. How about you?

HUGH

No, but I think I better. She'll be worried sick if she hears about this on the news.

Hugh heads for the door.

HUGH

You did the best you could, Balsey. Don't beat yourself up over this.

Balsey is left alone in the room. He looks out onto the ramp. Two Coast Guard helicopters lift off into the night sky. There is a knock on the door. A REPORTER enters the room but does not identify himself.

BALSEY

Are you the minister?

The reporter hesitates before approaching Balsey.

REPORTER

I was wondering if you could tell me what happened out there tonight?

Balsey looks the reporter over. He is not wearing a collar.

BALSEY

Do you have some identification?

REPORTER

I just want to ask a few questions. It won't take long.

Balsey rifles through the man's coat pockets. The reporter retreats and pulls out his wallet.

A CLOSEUP of his ID shows that he is a reporter.

BALSEY

You need to leave. And pass it on that the only person I want to talk to right now is a priest.

Balsey escorts the reporter to the door.

REPORTER

Will you talk to me later?

BALSEY

Don't push it.

REPORTER

(standing in the doorway)

I spoke with a few of the passengers. They said you did a beautiful job putting that plane down.

BALSEY

It wasn't beautiful enough. People were lost.

EXT. RAMP ST. CROIX AIRPORT - NIGHT

Bill Brazzell and CV Lindley scoop up life vests from the ramp and toss them in the back of the helicopter. Jim Rylee and Don Hartman approach the two.

JIM RYLEE

What are you doing?

CV LINDLEY

Thought we'd take home a couple of souvenirs.

BILL BRAZZELL

It's not like they're gonna be needing them any time soon.

Jim gives the response some thought then picks up a couple of life vests. He tosses them in the back.

JIM RYLEE

Come on. Let's go home.

INT. ST. CROIX AIRPORT BAR - NIGHT

A large group of marines sit at the bar tossing down drinks. John Barber enters the bar and heads toward his crew. They clear a seat for him at the bar and order him a drink.

RANDY LOGAN

Here he is. The man of the hour.
The best damn crew chief in the
Marines.

JOHN BARBER

You're just saying that because I
pulled your ass out of the water
before the sharks could get you.

RANDY LOGAN

Damn straight. I was gettin'
worried.

Glenn Warren and Bill Schrader sit at the bar a few seats down from John Barber.

BILL SCHRADER

I'd have left him for the sharks.

JOHN BARBER

Billy! Come over here. Let me
shake your hand.

(soul brothers
shake)

I heard you guys rescued three.

GLENN WARREN

He didn't do too bad for a rookie.

BILL SCHRADER

All I did was work the hoist.
Glenn and Ned are the real heroes.

JOHN BARBER

Everyone here is a hero in my
book.

(raises his glass)

To a job well done.

INT. CHARLES HARWOOD MEMORIAL HOSPITAL - NIGHT

SUPER CHARLES HARWOOD MEMORIAL HOSPITAL CHRISTIANSTEAD, ST.
CROIX

The scene is chaotic with survivors arriving by civilian
vehicles and being greeted by medical personnel with
gurneys.

Rick Arnold is one of the last survivors to arrive. He is
escorted into an examining room and told to put on a
hospital gown.

Rick slips into the flimsy gown. He is shivering. He sits
alone on an examining table for a brief period before a
HEAVY-SET DOCTOR, speaking in accented English, enters the
room.

HEAVY-SET DOCTOR

Good evening. Would you lie down
for me, please?

Rick lies prone on the table, his head resting on a thin
pillow. The doctor begins a perfunctory examination. He
finds the gash in Rick's finger.

HEAVY-SET DOCTOR

Is this your only injury?

RICK ARNOLD

My neck is a little sore, but
that's about it.

The doctor runs his hands along Rick's neck and shoulders. He goes to a table and pulls out a needle and thread from a drawer.

HEAVY-SET DOCTOR

This won't take long.

Rick eyes the needle.

RICK ARNOLD

Shouldn't I have something for the
pain?

HEAVY-SET DOCTOR

That won't be necessary.

The doctor grabs Rick's hands and without any preparation begins to stitch Rick's wound. Rick grimaces and tries his best to not scream out in pain.

When the doctor is through, Rick gets up from the table and enters the hallway where he begins to search for Loretta. He passes other survivors who are in much more serious shape than he.

Rick passes an opened door and spots Loretta lying on an examination table. Two DOCTORS are in the room having a discussion away from Loretta. Loretta spots Rick and yells for him.

LORETTA GREMELLSBACKER

Rick!

Rick enters the room and leans over Loretta.

RICK ARNOLD

Loretta, what's going on?

LORETTA GREMELLSBACKER

Rick, you have to stop them. They
want to operate. Tell them to put
me in a brace. I don't want them
operating on me.

The two doctors turn toward Rick

DOCTOR 1

Sir, are you related to this individual?

RICK ARNOLD

No. I'm a friend.

Rick approaches the two.

RICK ARNOLD

What kind of injuries does she have?

DOCTOR 1

She has a broken back. We were just discussing our options. Can you give consent if we decide to operate?

RICK ARNOLD

No, I cannot. She wants to be put in a brace. Is that possible?

DOCTOR 2

That is an option. But -

LORETTA GREMMELSBACKER

Don't let them do it, Rick!
Please!

INT. EASTERN AIRLINES VIP ROOM - NIGHT

Balsey is alone in the room. He sits on a chair with his head resting in his hands. There is a knock on the door.

BALSEY

Come in.

A priest, FATHER GOW, enters the room.

FATHER GOW

You must be the captain. I'm Father Gow.

BALSEY

Thank you for coming, Father. It's been a rough day.

FATHER GOW

I heard about the accident. I was about to leave for the airport when I got the call.

Balsey looks up, tears in his eyes.

BALSEY

I don't quite know how to say this. But I'm afraid that I may have caused some people their untimely death.

FATHER GOW

From what I've heard, you have also saved a few lives.

BALSEY

Why did this happen? I'm a good Christian. I go to church. I pray. I try to live a decent life.

FATHER GOW

I'm afraid I don't have any answers for you.

BALSEY

But those people out there were my responsibility.

Father Gow places his hand on Balsey's shoulder. Balsey's head is down.

FATHER GOW

We can't question God's motives.

BALSEY

God wasn't flying that airplane. I was. There were children on that plane. Two small girls. The adults...they can take care of themselves. But those children...

Balsey stands and walks toward the window overlooking the ramp.

BALSEY

When I was six years old my younger brother died from leukemia. A year later we lost my six-month old sister. I remember

my dad telling my brothers and sisters and me that we would have two guardian angels looking over us the rest of our lives. Until today, I believed him

FATHER GOW

They are watching over you. That's why you're still here.

EXT. CRASH SCENE - NIGHT

The USS Guadalcanal has arrived on scene. Crewmembers line the deck as spotlights from the ship scan the water. The Coast Guard cutter Point Whitehorn is also in the area searching the waters via a spotlight.

Overhead a Coast Guard HU-16 drops high intensity flares that light up the night sky. Two Coast Guard helicopters with directional spotlights hover five hundred feet above the water.

The combination of the flares dropped from the HU-16 and the numerous spotlights scanning the water gives the scene the appearance of a Hollywood premiere.

INT. ESTATE CARLTON HOTEL - NIGHT

Balsey, Harry, and Hugh walk down the hallway of a hotel. Their clothes are still damp and they are not wearing shoes.

Balsey reaches his room first. Before the other two can open the doors to their rooms, Balsey invites them to his room.

BALSEY

You guys mind stepping into my room for a minute.

Harry and Hugh follow Balsey into his room.

BALSEY

I just wanted to say that I'm sorry for what happened today. I take full responsibility.

HARRY

Maybe we should get our stories straight.

BALSEY

We don't need to get anything straight, Harry. You tell it just the way you saw it. We're a crew. We don't have to make up any damn stories.

EXT. CRASH SCENE - NIGHT

As viewed from water level, the night search is an eerie scene. But this view is far from the area being searched. As the camera pulls back the faint silhouette of a motionless survivor in a life vest can be seen.

INT. ONA HEADQUARTERS - DAY

The main floor of ONA headquarters is swarming with people. The phones are ringing; crewmembers in uniform crowd around a secretary's desk.

ONA Assistant Chief Pilot Ed Veronelli enters the room and a secretary directs him to the conference room.

Inside the conference room are all of ONA's department heads, including the Vice President of Legal BOB WAGENFELD. Steedman Hinckley sits at the end of the long conference table.

STEEDMAN

Ed, sorry we had to interrupt your camping trip.

ED VERONELLI

I got here as fast as I could.

STEEDMAN

You haven't missed much. Here's what we know so far.

Steedman refers to his notes.

STEEDMAN

Thirty six passengers were taken to the hospital. One was pronounced dead upon arrival at the hospital. There are twenty-two missing, including one crewmember.

ED VERONELLI

Who?

Steedman looks once again at his notes.

STEEDMAN

The stewardess, Margareth Abraham.

ED VERONELLI

Jesus! What about the families of the passengers?

STEEDMAN

ALM is handling that on both ends. We were just in the process of making a checklist of what needs to be done next.

(to Bill Bailey)

Bill, why don't read off the list?

Bill Bailey refers to his notes.

BILL BAILEY

This isn't in any particular order. But this is what we have so far: training records for the crews; all flight related documents including weather, dispatch release, flight plan, load manifest, and maintenance records.

ED VERONELLI

They'll probably want to see the fuel logs for the prior flights.

STEEDMAN

Good idea. Go ahead and add that to the list as well.

ED VERONELLI

We should also be prepared to answer questions about why the auxiliary fuel tank wasn't installed as required in the lease agreement.

BOB WAGENFELD

There was nothing improper done with regard to that fuel tank. It was a business decision plain and simple. My recommendation is to not even bring it up unless asked.

STEEDMAN

The decision to delay the installation of the fuel tank was mine. If and when that issue is brought up, I will be the one to deal with it.

ED VERONELLI

Anyone talk to Balsey?

STEEDMAN

I talked to him today. He's still pretty shaken up.

INT. GENERAL MERCHANDISE STORE ST. CROIX - DAY

Balsey, Harry, and Hugh enter a general merchandise store. Their ESCORT is dressed in a business suit.

ESCORT

I'm afraid there isn't a lot to choose from. This was the only store we could get to open on a Sunday and several passengers have already been here.

The three crewmembers peruse the limited clothing section. They each pick out brightly colored touristy-type shirts. Harry finds a pair of bright orange high-top tennis shoes.

HARRY

Would you believe this is the only pair in my size?

INT. CHARLES HARWOOD MEMORIAL HOSPITAL - MORNING

Bill Bohlke and his wife TUDDY enter the hospital and approach a NURSE.

BILL BOHLKE

We're here for Doctor Abrams.

NURSE

(to Tuddy)

Looks like you're about ready to burst. Let me get you a wheelchair.

The nurse grabs a wheelchair and offers it to Tuddy.

NURSE

Doctor Abrams isn't here yet. I'd offer to take you to a room but

we're still pretty full. I guess you heard about the airline accident last night.

TUDDY

We heard. Bill helped in the rescue.

NURSE

(to Bill)

You did?

BILL BOHLKE

Just dropped a few life rafts. That's all.

EXT. WATER - DAY

The Coast Guard cutter Point Whitehorn fishes out an empty life raft from the water. Also on deck are pieces of metal, life vests, seat cushions, luggage, and the rescue basket dropped by Bill Shields.

Helicopters and aircraft circle overhead. The USS Guadalcanal can be seen in the distance. A massive search is underway despite the continuing poor weather.

INT. SAN JUAN CENTER - DAY

DICK BAKER, an NTSB investigator, is introduced to the shift supervisor. He is the same supervisor who was working during the ditching.

DICK BAKER

I'm Dick Baker with the NTSB. I'll be heading up the investigation on ALM 980. I was wondering if I could listen to the communication tapes from yesterday.

SUPERVISOR

Certainly. Follow me.

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - DAY

Tuddy is resting comfortably in a bed. Bill is thumbing through the Sunday paper; a story about the ditching is on the front page. Passenger Jim Razzi knocks on the door.

JIM RAZZI

(to Bill Bohlke)

Hi, sorry to bother you. The nurse said that you were flying one of the rescue planes yesterday.

BILL BOHLKE

I was in the Skyvan. We dropped a few life rafts.

JIM RAZZI

Well, I wanted to thank you. I was wondering if maybe you might have seen my wife in the water. She's twenty-seven, light blond hair, thin build, very pretty. I haven't seen her since the accident. I thought that maybe...

Bill exchanges glances with Tuddy. It's obvious that the man is having a tough time over the loss of his wife.

BILL BOHLKE

It's really difficult to make out details from the air. It would be impossible for me -

JIM RAZZI

Of course. I understand. I'm sure you were busy flying the plane. Hope everything goes okay for you and your wife.

As Jim starts to leave a few more passengers can be seen just outside the door.

PASSENGER (O.S)

Did he see anything? Were there people still in the water?

BILL BOHLKE

(to Tuddy)

Would you mind if I went to the airport? I've got a ton of work to do.

Tuddy gives her approval.

BILL BOHLKE

Have someone call me before they take you into the delivery room.

TUDDY

I will. I love you.

BILL BOHLKE

Love you, too.

INT. HOTEL LOBBY - LATE AFTERNOON

A large group of people are gathered in the lobby of the hotel. The group consists of ALM and Dutch officials as well as family members of the two stewards.

Wilfred's wife, MARLENE, is first to spot her husband and Tito arriving in the lobby. The conversations are in Papiamentu with subtitles.

MARLENE

There he is.

She rushes toward her husband and the two embrace.

WILFRED SPENCER

Now, now, Marlene. Everything is going to be all right. I'm fine.

Wilfred spots his supervisor MAX WAAS.

WILFRED SPENCER

Max, good to see you. Where's Tawa?

MAX WAAS

Europe. He should be back in Curaçao tomorrow.

Tito is greeted affectionately by his brother and sister.

Margareth's fiancé, Robby Schouten, and her twin brother, CAROL ABRAHAM, are last to greet Wilfred and Tito.

ROBBY SCHOUTEN

Tito, glad to see you're okay.

TITO CORDEIRO

Thank you. I'm a big fan of your show. Sorry we couldn't have met under better circumstances.

ROBBY SCHOUTEN

Me too.

Wilfred finally breaks free from his wife's grasp. Robby and Carol pull him aside.

ROBBY SCHOUTEN

Wilfred, hell of a job getting those passengers into their life jackets.

WILFRED SPENCER

We were just doing our job.

ROBBY SCHOUTEN

(introducing Carol)

This is Margareth's brother,
Carol.

The two men shake hands.

ROBBY SCHOUTEN

Anything you can tell us about
Margareth?

WILFRED SPENCER

I'm afraid I haven't seen her.

CAROL ABRAHAM

Did she make it out of the plane?

WILFRED SPENCER

I don't know. The last time I saw
her was just before the plane hit
the water.

ROBBY SCHOUTEN

Carol and I are thinking about
renting a plane and doing our own
search. Anything you can tell us
that might help?

WILFRED SPENCER

I'm afraid not. I'd go with you if
I could. But I don't think Marlene
would approve.

INT. BILL BOHLKE'S OFFICE - LATE AFTERNOON

Bill is working with a calculator and a stack of receipts
when the phone rings.

BILL BOHLKE

(into handset)

Hello...

It's the call he's been waiting for. He hangs up the
handset and dashes out the door.

INT. HOSPITAL DELIVERY ROOM - EVENING

Bill Bohlke, dressed in a slipover hospital scrub, arrives just in time to greet his baby girl.

HALLWAY

The reporter seen earlier is nosing around in the hallway. He glances into a room through a partially opened door.

REPORTER'S POV - A woman lies alone on a hospital bed. She is hooked up to an IV and a heart monitor. She stares off into space.

The reporter stops a nurse who walks by.

REPORTER

What's her story?

NURSE

Poor woman lost her husband and two little girls in the accident.

DELIVERY ROOM

Tuddy holds her daughter for the first time. The baby coos in her mother's arms.

GLORIA CALDWELL'S HOSPITAL ROOM

Gloria Caldwell's room is silent and dark.

INT. BALSEY'S KITCHEN - DAY

SUPER MONDAY MAY 4, 1970

A LOCAL REPORTER is interviewing Balsey's wife and mother. They sit at the kitchen table thumbing through an old photo album with pictures of Balsey.

BALSEY'S MOTHER

(pointing)

That's him in his ROTC uniform. So handsome.

LOCAL REPORTER

(to Balsey's mother)

How long has your son been a pilot?

BALSEY'S MOTHER

He's been flying for quite a while. I guess he started when he was in the military. He had his pilot's license before he got his driver's license.

EDITH

Dean is a good pilot. He was a flight instructor at ONA. He was also a flight instructor for United Airlines. Something must have really gone wrong for this to have happened.

LOCAL REPORTER

You called him Dean. I thought his name was Balsey?

EDITH

I use his middle name. Never did like calling him by his first name.

Edit glances over at Balsey's mother. It's obvious that Edith's preference to use Dean is a matter of contention between the two.

LOCAL REPORTER

Any idea when you might see him again?

EDITH

We're not sure. We just have to be patient. There's an investigation going on. The main thing is that he's alive. God's been awfully good to us.

The phone rings and Edith excuses herself from the table to answer it. The reporter jots down a few notes.

EDITH

Hello...yes, he's still here. Just a second.

(to the reporter)

It's for you.

The reporter looks surprised as he takes the handset.

LOCAL REPORTER

Yeah...you're kidding? When did this happen? All right...I'm just about finished here...I'll get back as soon as I can.

(hangs up the phone)

I'm afraid I have to cut our interview short. There's been a shooting.

EDITH

Where?

LOCAL REPORTER

Kent State University in Ohio. Some students were shot by National Guardsmen.

Edith switches on the TV. News of the shootings are on screen.

ARCHIVAL FOOTAGE

The shootings at Kent State

INT. PIPER CHEROKEE - DAY

Bill Bohlke is the pilot. To his right sits Robby Schouten. Carol Abraham is in the back of the four seat plane. They are flying over a calm sea. The weather is clear with not a cloud in sight. All eyes are on the water.

EXT. ST. CROIX AIRPORT - DAY

A small turboprop plane lands and pulls in front of the main passenger terminal. Among the passengers getting off the plane are Steedman Hinckley and Ed Veronelli. They are accompanied by lawyer Bob Wagenfeld.

EXT. HOTEL BEACHSIDE RESTAURANT - DAY

Balsey, Harry, and Hugh are having dinner with Steedman, Ed, and Bob Wagenfeld. The mood is subdued. Bus boys remove the dinner plates.

HUGH HART

Any idea when the NTSB is going to question us?

BOB WAGENFELD

I talked with the lead investigator this afternoon. The Dutch officials are insisting that the interviews be conducted on Dutch soil.

HUGH HART

Do we have to remain on the island? I'd like to get back home.

BOB WAGENFELD

It would be better if you wait. They should have their differences worked out soon. Hopefully tomorrow. Thursday at the latest.

Steedman stands and taps Balsey on the shoulder. The two men take a walk along the beach.

BALSEY

I'm really sorry about all of this, Steedman.

STEEDMAN

There's nothing to be sorry about. What happened, happened. We'll learn from it and move on.

(beat)

You remember that flight we had in Germany? The one where the engine quit shortly after takeoff?

BALSEY

Yeah. The Hungarian airlift. I remember.

STEEDMAN

I never told you this before, but you impressed me the way you handled that emergency. From that day on I thought you were one of the best pilots I'd ever flown with...still do.

Steedman stops walking and faces Balsey.

STEEDMAN

No matter what happens, Balsey. We're still friends. Nothing is going to change that.

INT. HOTEL CONFERENCE ROOM SITE OF THE NTSB PUBLIC HEARINGS

SUPER NTSB PUBLIC HEARINGS SAN JUAN PUERTO RICO JULY 1970

Balsey is on the witness stand. He is dressed in a dark blue suit. He is considerably thinner since the accident.

NTSB board members and other interested parties sit at three long conference tables positioned in a U pattern. About a hundred spectators fill the conference room. Balsey is being questioned by NTSB board member MARTY SPEIZER.

MARTY SPEIZER

When did you become convinced in your own mind that a fuel emergency existed?

BALSEY

I would say on the climb to twelve thousand. The fuel totalizer was spinning and we weren't really sure what the fuel was. We were also trying to determine our distance from St. Thomas and St. Croix. All of these things are going through our minds, trying to...

As Balsey answers the question a SPECTATOR comments to another spectator about the proceedings.

SPECTATOR

(overlapping with
Balsey's testimony)

I heard all three of the ONA crewmembers were terminated.

BALSEY

It was approximately at 7,000 feet that I finally made the decision that now I am going to have to rely upon the fact that the gauge reading is right because I have no facts to go upon. This is when I decided I had to get back toward the water.

MARTY SPEIZER

What was the gauge reading at 7,000 feet, do you recall?

BALSEY

Not exactly, but I think that we were between four and five hundred pounds at that time. It was right in this vicinity of time here, getting a clearance out of seven.

SPECTATOR

(overlapping with
Balsey's testimony)

The FAA yanked all of their certificates. I don't think he'll ever fly again.

MARTY SPEIZER

When you went to emergency power, would you describe what emergency systems were available to you, especially in the area of communications between the cabin and yourself in the cockpit?

BALSEY

I don't quite follow your question here at this time, Mr. Speizer.

MARTY SPEIZER

A number of passengers have commented that there was no warning from the cockpit prior to the ditching. Why didn't you use the PA to warn the passengers?

BALSEY

The public address system from the cockpit to the cabin was inoperative on this flight.

Marty Speizer is caught off guard by this comment and stops in his tracks.

MARTY SPEIZER

I beg your pardon.

BALSEY

The public address system from the cockpit to the cabin was inoperative on the flight.

MARTY SPEIZER

When did it become inoperative?

BALSEY

It was inoperative when I checked it at JFK.

Reporters covering the hearings jot down notes. Hushed comments can be heard throughout the spectator section.

HEARINGS LATER

Balsey is still on the stand. NTSB lead investigator Dick Baker is doing the questioning.

DICK BAKER

En route you stated that you made descents to lower altitudes and changes of mach readings to lower mach.

BALSEY

Yes, sir.

DICK BAKER

Wouldn't this automatically mean more fuel burned per mile?

BALSEY

No, sir. I was already running into turbulence, and I could see a cirrus shelf above me. I had the possibility of climbing to a higher altitude at that point, and also running into some heavy clear air turbulence. So I elected to descend, stay out of the wind, not use the fuel, and also stay out of the turbulence.

HEARINGS LATER

Balsey is still on the witness stand, looking as confident as he did when he first sat down. He answers questions from another NTSB BOARD MEMBER.

NTSB BOARD MEMBER

When you started the NDB approach, could you have had more than a 600 foot ceiling?

BALSEY

According to the weather that I was given, if this is what you are

talking about, when I started the approach, the weather given to me was a thousand feet.

NTSB BOARD MEMBER

I was talking about your personal observations. Did you think it was 1,000 feet?

BALSEY

No. It was right down there about six or seven hundred feet. But we are in a situation where we don't know what the ceiling is. We have precipitation. It's pretty hard to tell where the clouds begin and the rain begins.

HEARINGS LATER

Balsey is still being questioned by the same NTSB Board member.

NTSB BOARD MEMBER

If your aircraft had been fully functioning with the public address system working, how would you have notified the passengers of impact?

BALSEY

Sir, you are asking a question to which I can only give an assumption. The PA wasn't working. It would have been nice to have but we didn't have it. There are a lot of things that I wish were different. I would have liked a little more time; I would have liked a little more fuel; I would have liked for the weather to have been better.

(combative)

I would have liked to have made it to St. Croix and not have to live with the fact that there are twenty-three people who are no longer with us due to mistakes I may or may not have made.

All eyes are riveted on Balsey. ISABEL BURGESS, the NTSB chair person, addresses the Board.

ISABEL BURGESS

I think this would be a good opportunity to take a break. We'll resume questioning at 1:00 p.m. Captain, you are excused.

As Balsey leaves the witness stand he is swarmed by a crowd of reporters. Balsey swipes away the microphone of one reporter who gets a little too close.

BALSEY

If you guys start pushing me where I can't breathe, I'll make room.

When the reporters don't move fast enough, Balsey plows right through them.

BALSEY

Does anyone here understand English?

INT. HOTEL ELEVATOR

Balsey is in the elevator alone. Just as the doors are about to close he is joined by Ed Veronelli.

ED VERONELLI

They're just a bunch of armchair quarterbacks. Anyone can second guess things after the fact.

BALSEY

How's Steedman been handling all of this?

The doors close and Ed presses the button for his floor.

ED VERONELLI

He's still a fan of yours, Balsey. He didn't want to let you go. It was the lawyers and the insurance company that insisted on it.

The door opens and Ed steps half way out, blocking the door from closing.

ED VERONELLI

You're one of the best stick and rudder guys I know. If you couldn't get that plane on the ground in St. Maarten, no one could have.

EXT. WOODED AREA - DAY

SUPER TWO YEARS LATER

The SOUND of a HAMMER pierces an otherwise tranquil scene. Balsey is pounding away inside a house still under construction.

A car approaches and Balsey's wife Edith steps out of the car. She is dressed in a nurse's uniform.

EDITH

You should take a break. You've been out here all day.

BALSEY

I'm almost done.

Balsey stops to admire his handiwork.

BALSEY

It's starting to look like a real house.

EDITH

I can't wait to call it home.

(beat)

I had an interesting call from Tom Watkins today.

BALSEY

From the high school?

EDITH

He said he ran into you down at the sports store.

BALSEY

He was in a couple of days ago. We talked about the upcoming school year.

EDITH

Well, apparently you must have made an impression because he wants to hire you to teach a mechanical engineering class.

This news takes Balsey by surprise.

BALSEY

Teach a class? I don't know if I'm cut out for that. Besides I don't know if I'll have the house finished in time.

EDITH

Don't worry about the house. We can hire contractors if we have to. This is the first real job offer that you've had in two years. It's teaching, Dean. It's what you're good at.

BALSEY

I never pictured myself as a high school teacher, but I guess it can't be that different from teaching a class of new hires.

Balsey walks with Edith back to the car.

BALSEY

Thanks for sticking with me, Edith. I don't know if I could have gotten through this without you.

After a long embrace and kiss, they climb into the car and drive off.