

USCG LANTAREA CHAPLAIN'S AFTER ACTION REPORT FOR CHAPLAINS INVOLVED IN THE RECOVERY OF EGYPTAIR FLIGHT 990

BACKGROUND

On 31 October 1999, at approximately 0150, EST, EgyptAir Flight 990 traveling from New York to Cairo, crashed in the Atlantic Ocean about 60 miles south of Nantucket Island, Massachusetts. The airplane was a Boeing 767 model 366 ER, a stretched and extended range version of the basic 767. There were 217 passengers and crew on board. According to the International Civil Aviation Organization treaty, the investigation of a plane crash in international waters is under the jurisdiction of the country of registry of the aircraft. At the request of the Egyptian government, the National Transportation Safety Board took over the investigation of the accident. The Coast Guard was immediately called to respond to the accident in an attempt to search for any possible survivors.

COMMAND CENTER

Upon learning of the accident the USCG initially set up the Command Center at USCG Group Woods Hole near USCG Air Station Cape Cod. By Sunday afternoon the decision was made to move the Command Center to NETC, Newport, Rhode Island. Chaplain Dennis Boyle, AS Cape Cod, arrived in Newport around 1000 on Monday, 1 November, during the initial setting up of the Center. Chaplain Wilbur Douglass, LANTAREA Chaplain, arrived at the Center around 1430 the same day. Together they established a permanent location within the Center for USCG Chaplains by securing a table and a dedicated phone number. It was from this phone that all information regarding Chaplain services and activities was received and disseminated. Because of the location of the Senior USCG Chaplain information concerning the activities and locations of the USCG units involved in the recovery operation was readily available. By conferring with the Logistics and Operations divisions of the Coast Guard agency, decisions regarding the number and the specific needs of the Chaplains was accomplished in a timely manner. By the end of the afternoon of 1 November, Chaplain Douglass made calls to Chaplains James Ellis, District Nine Chaplain (Cleveland, Ohio) and Gregory Todd, USCG Activities New York requesting their immediate presence to assist with the pastoral coverage of the units involved.

Chaplain Boyle returned to AS Cape Cod on the evening of 1 November. Chaplains St. Martin, AS Cape Cod, and Todd arrived on Tuesday morning, 2 November. Chaplain Ellis arrived in Newport late that evening and reported to the Center on Wednesday morning, 3 November. The efforts of the Chaplains was greatly aided by both Naval Station Newport Chaplains, CDR Tim Demy, and LCDR Bill Kennedy, who visited the Center on a daily basis to provide additional coverage.

WORKING WITH THE AMERICAN RED CROSS VOLUNTEERS

Although the initial focus of the CG Chaplains was to provide pastoral care and counseling to the crewmembers of the units involved in the recovery, we were asked to

aid in the planning of a memorial service for the victims of EgyptAir Flight 990. The plan was to conduct the service before the families began returning home. A request for the military chaplains was made by the American Red Cross to assist with the planning. Chaplain Jim Ellis was asked to represent the CG Chaplains at the meeting. Three more meetings were held before the memorial service was conducted on Sunday, 8 November. In addition, the families requested and received permission to witness the recovered wreckage on Saturday, 7 November. Because of our presence at the family briefings and Chaplain Ellis' established relationships through the memorial service planning meetings, we were again asked by the American Red Cross to accompany the families on the busses to Quonset Point where the wreckage was being held. Thus, Chaplains Douglass, Ellis, and Demy supplemented the clergy and caregivers of the ARC's Disaster Response Team.

CHAPLAIN TURNOVER/TRANSITION OF RESPONSIBILITIES

ISSUES OF CONCERN

RECOMMENDATIONS

INDIVIDUAL ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Those Chaplains involved in the recovery operations of EgyptAir Flight 990:

CDR Wilbur Douglass, USCG Atlantic Area/Fifth Coast Guard District

Upon arrival to Command Center, assumed supervisory responsibilities of all chaplains involved in recovery operations. He ensured that units were visited and that proper liaisons were established between the agencies involved. On his first day in Newport he remained at the Center through the evening until time to travel to Quonset Point to meet the USCGC HAMMERHEAD as they offloaded wreckage and human remains.

CDR James Ellis, Ninth Coast Guard District

He was responsible for the major planning of the memorial service for the victims of the crash. He established a working relationship with the members of the American Red Cross and provided a link between their services and the chaplains. His abilities also established a working relationship between the Coast Guard Command Center and the ARC.

CDR Tim Demy, Naval Station Newport

Chaplain Demy made himself available the entire time of the recovery operations. He visited the Command Center and assisted the families during the visitation of the plane wreckage and at the memorial service.

LCDR Peter St. Martin, USCG Air Station Cape Cod

LCDR Gregory Todd, USCG Activities New York

LCDR Peter Gregory, USS AUSTIN

LCDR Bill Kennedy, Naval Station Newport

LT Dennis Boyle, USCG Air Station Cape Cod

RECOMMENDATIONS

CONCLUSION

DEFINING OUR ROLE AS CHAPLAINS