

The Officers, Directors and Members of

US SAILING

are pleased to present the

ARTHUR B. HANSON RESCUE MEDAL

to the crew of

MYSTIC SUN

FOR THE RESCUE AS FOLLOWS:

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**Rescue at Sea
Vacationing CYC'ers Save Four From 15-Foot Swells Off Leeward Islands
by Jane Casler**

At first they figured the tiny red blip on the horizon might be a marker. They checked it out. Great - a rock on the chart! Another little surprise from Mother Nature was just what they needed. With 25-30-knot winds and 15-foot waves pounding their hull, Paul McLaughlin, his daughter Megan, her friend Brett and Paul's long-time pals, Ken and Pat Commass, had just one mission in mind-getting Paul's 44-foot charter, Mystic Sun safety to port. But seconds later, when another reddish glow pierced the skies to the southwest, their pressing mission took a more urgent turn.

The blips were flares!

"At first we said, 'The Coast Guard will check it out,' recalls Pat. "This was the Caribbean, after all - cruise city! But then we thought, what if someone really is in trouble. What if it were us?" They headed south. "We were on a 35-mile passage from Dominica to Martinique," says Paul.

"It was windy, really windy, with substantial waves. We hadn't seen another boat in hours." Just days earlier, the Commass's had joined Paul and his crew for a week of island hopping, cruising, and fun in the sun. But no one had bargained for this. After an hour of punching through the waves like liquid cement, the CYC'ers finally reached the vicinity of the flare. "At first we couldn't see a thing," says Ken. "Everyone was soaked to the skin. Our eyes were stinging. It was Pat who finally spotted them."

"I saw two men and a woman," says Pat. "They were see-sawing back and forth on 15-foot swells." After some tricky maneuvering, the CYC'ers pulled alongside. But they were about to bring the trio aboard, one of the men signaled "NO!" "It was crazy," says Pat. "He was frantic - waving his arms this way and that, screaming, 'No. No.'"

After some tense and confusing moments, they understood. The woman's husband, the fourth member of their party, had been separated from the rest when their yacht went down. "They were pleading with us to go find him," says Pat. "The last they'd seen of him, he'd thrown a flimsy Avon dinghy off their sinking boat and jumped after it. He'd made it to the dinghy, but that's all they knew." If the missing man were to be found in those turbulent waters, every minute would count. After ensuring that the raft and its crew were intact, the CYC'ers headed west (out to sea!) in the direction of the sunken craft. A half-hour later, they saw him.

"He'd been in the water for an hour and a half, bailing with his hands," says Paul. "He'd lashed himself to the dinghy without oars or any other provisions. Until we came along, the poor fellow had literally been adrift to Nicaragua." Safe aboard the Mystic Sun, Peter Bettridge, an Englishman, told a harrowing tale. He, his wife, and their two companions had been sailing a J/130. They'd reefed the 44-foot racing boat in the high seas, but the powerful winds had snapped their mast in two pieces. Leaving the others aft, Peter had gone forward to try to sever the stays from the mast. They'd been able to cut the shrouds, but the stays were still attached to the huge chunk of mast in the water. Like the elastic in a giant slingshot, the stays were propelling the mast again and again against the boat's hull. Despite Peter's efforts, the yacht went down fast – inside of a half-hour. His wife and the others trapped in the stern, were able to launch the rafts before the boat sank. But Peter couldn't get back. His only resort – a rubber dinghy.

"He did manage to take one item along," quips Ken. "His wife's credit card! It lends new meaning to the slogan, 'Don't leave home without it.'" The CYC'ers and their new friend returned to the rafts just in time to see the occupants being pulled onto another maxi boat after two hours, Creighton's Naturally, which had responded to Mystic Sun's radio call for help. "We hadn't seen another vessel in hours," says Ken. "But there she was, another good Samaritan. Not only that, but Peter's wife had actually crewed on Creighton's Naturally in a transatlantic course the previous year." Coincidence or X-Files material? The truth is out there!

John B. Bonds
Chairman, Safety at Sea Committee
By Direction

**The Arthur B. Hanson Rescue Award was awarded to the rescuing crew of
Mystic Sun on October 18, 1997 at the annual US SAILING
General Meeting in Newport, RI.**

DETAILS

Paul McLaughlin esq.,
Skipper Yacht "Mystic Sun"

Marblehead, MA USA

Old Woodstock
Oxford, England

April 26, 1997

Sinking of "Prickly Bear" 14th March 1997

Dear Paul,

Now that I have finally arrived back in England and sorted out most of the Insurance problems (and paid by Pantaenius to the full extent of my policy, which, although not a complete replacement figure, will go most of the way to a new boat!)

I realise I have not yet got around to thanking you and your crew for your awareness of our plight, and taking the necessary action to rescue us. Had you not spotted our flares, I hate to think how we would ever have found Peter again. He jumped into the dinghy which he was freeing from the foredeck, because he felt that he could not get back aft to the Liferrafts in time and shot off downwind with no flares, water or survival equipment, so he owes his life to you.

We were all taken south to Rodney Bat, St. Lucia, arriving after sunset and I spent the next four days phoning and faxing everyone from family to racing crew members, being interviewed by Police, British High Commission, Insurance Assessors, etc., all more traumatic than the actual dismasting and sinking. I then flew up to Tortola to join a friend's yacht, as I had previously arranged to join him with mine. My family then flew in and we managed to salvage some of the holiday, finishing with a week in Orlando to celebrate my daughter's 10th Birthday. We arrived back here on 15th April.

I understand you were also ex-Navy, which probably explains how well-organised you were for such an emergency. I was a carrier pilot in the RN some 30 years ago, but was still relieved to be able to walk away with the crew intact from this one.

If you are ever in this part of the world, please come and stay; you would be most welcome.

With renewed thanks,

Yours Sincerely,
Jeremy JL Holland