

Fourteen From the Storm: The Coast Guard Rescue of the HMS Bounty

Notice Nearby · Film · October 11, 2026

<https://noticenearby.com/papers/fourteen-from-the-storm-hms-bounty-coast-guard-rescue>



On Oct. 29, 2012, 16 people went into the Atlantic from a sinking tall ship in the path of Hurricane Sandy. Two Coast Guard Jayhawk crews pulled 14 of them out. This is the record of that morning, drawn from the NTSB and Coast Guard investigations and from the helicopters' own cameras and radio.

Watch the film on YouTube: Fourteen From the Storm (10:40)

(<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pW4nGDxKk6Y>). Every helicopter shot and every radio line in it is real U.S. Coast Guard footage. The 60-second cut is a YouTube Short: 16 people in the sea at 4:26 A.M. (<https://youtube.com/shorts/Ng0rLSIMa8Q>).

Chapters: 0:00 Cold open (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pW4nGDxKk6Y&t=0s>) · 0:28 1. The Decision (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pW4nGDxKk6Y&t=28s>) · 1:28 2. Taking on Water (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pW4nGDxKk6Y&t=88s>) · 2:24 3. 4:26 A.M. (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pW4nGDxKk6Y&t=144s>) · 3:16 4. First Light (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pW4nGDxKk6Y&t=196s>) · 5:38 5. The Second Raft (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pW4nGDxKk6Y&t=338s>) · 8:33 6. Fourteen (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pW4nGDxKk6Y&t=513s>) · 9:14 7. The Two (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pW4nGDxKk6Y&t=554s>)

Timeline: Oct. 25–Nov. 1, 2012 (Eastern Daylight Time)

- Oct. 25, 1800: Bounty leaves New London, Conn., with 16 aboard.
- Oct. 27, about 0900: The captain turns southwest, toward Sandy's path.
- Oct. 28, 2045: The Coast Guard is told the Bounty is in trouble.
- Oct. 29, 0341: The captain emails: "We are in distress."
- 0426: The Bounty heels over and all 16 go into the water.
- 0641: The first Jayhawk is on scene and starts hoisting.
- Morning: 14 are rescued, five by one helicopter and nine by the other.
- 1638: Claudene Christian is found with no vital signs.

- 1920: Last sighting of the Bounty, in about 14,000 feet of water.
- Nov. 1, about 2000: The search for Capt. Robin Walbridge is suspended.

The ship

The Bounty was built in 1960 in Lunenburg, Nova Scotia, for MGM's 1962 film Mutiny on the Bounty. She was a wooden, three-masted replica, 108.4 feet long on deck. In October 2012 she was 52 years old and sailing as a sail-training vessel. She leaked, and the crew pumped her bilges every few hours as routine.

On the evening of Oct. 25, 2012, the captain met with the crew at 1700. An hour later, at 1800, the Bounty left New London, Connecticut, with 16 people aboard. She was bound for St. Petersburg, Florida. Sandy had strengthened in the Caribbean and was moving north along the coast.

The decision

Before departure the captain told the crew that he meant to take the Bounty southeast, well out to sea, and let the hurricane pass southwest of the ship. He told them anyone uncomfortable with the trip was free to leave. No one did. Then, on Oct. 27 (the Coast Guard report puts it at about 0900), he turned southwest, onto a course that would cross the storm's projected path.

In an email to the vessel organization's shoreside director, the captain wrote:

"Thanks for the [weather] update, because of it I feel okay about trying to sneak to the west of Sandy, new course 225 T. It looks like it will stay offshore enough [for] us to squeak by. Thx."

The forecasts he had were not hidden. The National Hurricane Center's advisories said Sandy's tropical-storm-force winds reached up to 450 miles from its center. The NTSB later wrote that the captain may have focused too narrowly on the position of the eye rather than on the full size of a storm whose winds spanned more than 1,000 miles.

Taking on water

By midday on Sunday, Oct. 28, the crew described 30-foot seas and 90-knot winds. Things went wrong one after another. The port engine failed. The fore course sail tore. In the middle of the afternoon the captain fell and was hurt. By about 1600 there were about 3 feet of water in the engine room, and the bilge pumps could no longer keep up.

At 2045 that night the vessel organization told Coast Guard Sector North Carolina that the Bounty was in trouble. About 90 minutes later a Coast Guard HC-130 launched to fly out and circle overhead, keeping radio contact with the ship through the night.

The captain still described the ship as sound. In an email that night he wrote that "we are not in danger tonight, but if conditions don't improve on the boat we will be tomorrow," and that "the boat is doing great - we can't dewater."

About 2130 the Bounty lost power. By about midnight she was adrift, with no propulsion and no working way to pump herself out.

The longest night

At 0223 on Monday, Oct. 29, there were 10 feet of water inside the hull, rising about 2 feet an hour.

About 0330 everyone aboard gathered and put on immersion suits. One crewmember told investigators that around this time the captain asked, "What went wrong? At what point

did we lose control?"

At 0341 the captain emailed the Coast Guard Sector North Carolina command center: "We have lost all dewatering abilities. Estimate 6 - 10 hours left. ... We are in distress. Ship is fine we can't dewater. Need pumps."

The weather was too severe to send rescue helicopters into the dark. The plan was for the crew to hold on until daylight and abandon ship in a planned mass rescue at 0800.

At 0407 the C-130 crew reported that all 16 people were on the weather deck in immersion suits. Shortly after 0400, the chief mate twice recommended abandoning ship while the Bounty was still upright. Both times, he testified, the captain told him "not yet."

4:26 A.M.

At 0426 the Bounty heeled hard over to starboard and buried her bow. The chief mate told the captain the foredeck was underwater. A crewmember heard the captain reply, "we need to go."

They had no time to launch anything in order. The ship rolled onto her beam ends, her masts swinging from vertical to flat against the water. Everyone went into the sea in total darkness, about 110 nautical miles southeast of Cape Hatteras. Winds were 50 to 60 knots, gusting to 90. Seas were over 20 feet. The water was 78°F.

The Bounty did not go quietly. Lying on her side, she kept rising and falling in the swells, and each roll brought her rigging crashing down onto the people trying to swim clear. Two crewmembers who had clipped themselves together were caught in the rigging and dragged under as the spars plunged below the surface. They got free only after one of them took off his immersion suit.

One of the ship's two 25-person liferafts had inflated by itself. Another group clung to a raft still packed in its canister until they could pull the lanyard and inflate it. Every survivor described how hard it was to climb into a raft from open ocean in a waterlogged survival suit. The crew told investigators it took close to an hour.

Before he left the ship, the chief mate told the C-130 overhead that they were abandoning ship.

First light

At 0434, Sector North Carolina ordered the launch. The weather was still beyond the normal limits for the MH-60 Jayhawk helicopters at Air Station Elizabeth City. They went anyway.

At 0640 the C-130 crew, call sign CG-2003, reported 15- to 20-foot seas and 57 mph winds on scene. One minute later, at 0641, the first Jayhawk, CG-6012, arrived, put its rescue swimmer in the water and began hoisting. A second Jayhawk, CG-6031, came in shortly behind it.

The first person recovered was the chief mate, pulled from the open water rather than from a raft. Everyone else came out of the two liferafts or the water right beside them.

The second raft

The footage in the film comes from the Jayhawks' cabin and sensor cameras, with the crews' intercom running underneath. It is plain, procedural and relentless. The hoist operator calls every move, "Back 10," "Right five," and the pilots hold a hover over 20-foot seas. On the intercom, a set of waves comes in:

"Here comes a big wave." "Roger. We'll wait."

The rafts would not stay upright. Again and again a rescue swimmer went down the cable and swam to a raft, and survivors came up one at a time. Then a raft capsized, throwing the people still in it back into the sea. On the radio:

"That raft flipped too."

The swimmer went back for them. Late in the hoisting came a surprise:

"All right, there's one more person in the raft." / "Guy was hiding."

Fuel was a constant worry. Earlier on the recording: "Time to splash? Splash is when we run out of gas." Later, as the basket came up again: "Exactly one hour on scene."

Fourteen

Then the count. On the 6031 recording a crewman tallies the cabin:

"We have eight? We have eight. All right, there's one in the raft, so we'll have a total of nine. How many they got in the other plane?" / "Five."

Nine in one helicopter. Five in the other. Fourteen alive.

The survivors were flown to Air Station Elizabeth City, North Carolina, for medical checks. The Coast Guard said none had life-threatening injuries. The NTSB recorded cuts, broken bones and three serious injuries among the 14.

The two

Two people were still missing: Capt. Robin Walbridge, 63, and deckhand Claudene Christian, 42. Crewmembers had seen both of them on deck as the ship went over. They lost sight of them when everyone went into the water.

The search continued all day. A third Jayhawk, CG-6043, checked the Bounty's rigging with infrared sensors from about 40 yards. Over the radio, a crew reported, "And they said there's something red floating on the water out here."

At 1638, Coast Guard crews recovered Claudene Christian in her immersion suit about 8 nautical miles southeast of where the Bounty had gone over. She had no vital signs. The aircrew performed CPR during the flight to the air station, and emergency medical technicians continued on the way to Albemarle Hospital in Elizabeth City. She arrived at 1843 and was pronounced dead at 1900.

At 1920 the Coast Guard cutter Elm saw the Bounty one last time, lying over with her masts out of the water at 33°49.6'N, 73°44.3'W, about 123 miles southeast of Cape Hatteras, over roughly 14,000 feet of water. Then she was gone.

The search for Capt. Walbridge went on for about two and a half days, until the limits of survival in that water had passed. The Coast Guard Fifth District suspended it at about 2000 on Thursday, Nov. 1, 2012. He was never found.

In memory of Claudene Christian and Capt. Robin Walbridge.

What the investigators found

The Coast Guard held a formal investigation, and the National Transportation Safety Board took part in its hearing. The NTSB adopted its findings on Feb. 6, 2014. Its probable cause reads, in full:

"The National Transportation Safety Board determines that the probable cause of the sinking of tall ship Bounty was the captain's reckless decision to sail the vessel into the well-forecasted path of Hurricane Sandy, which subjected the aging vessel and the inexperienced crew to conditions from which the vessel could not recover. Contributing to the sinking was the lack of effective safety oversight by the vessel organization."

Fourteen people lived because two helicopter crews, their rescue swimmers and the C-130 crew overhead flew into weather beyond their limits at first light and stayed until the count reached fourteen.

Credits and notes

Footage and images: U.S. Coast Guard and NASA/NOAA, public domain. Their use does not imply endorsement by the U.S. Coast Guard, the Department of Homeland Security, NASA or NOAA.

Narration: The narration in the film is an AI-generated voice. The radio and intercom audio is the Coast Guard's original recording. The music is original. Some faces of rescued crew are blurred.

Rescued crew: Out of respect for their privacy, this page does not name the 14 survivors. Notice Nearby is not affiliated with the U.S. Coast Guard or the NTSB.

Notes and sources

1. NTSB Marine Accident Brief NTSB/MAB-14/03, "Sinking of Tall Ship Bounty" (adopted Feb. 6, 2014): <https://www.nts.gov/investigations/AccidentReports/Reports/MAB1403.pdf>
2. NTSB investigation page DCA13LM003: <https://www.nts.gov/investigations/Pages/DCA13LM003.aspx>
3. U.S. Coast Guard Report of Investigation, MISLE Activity 4474 (Sept. 18, 2013), public redacted copy: https://www.sailingscuttlebutt.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/06/Final-redacted-ROI-FAM-END_2.pdf
4. U.S. Coast Guard video and release, "Coast Guard rescues 14, searches for 2, HMS Bounty" (DVIDS 159583): <https://www.dvidshub.net/video/159583/coast-guard-rescues-14-searches-2-hms-bounty>
5. U.S. Coast Guard, "HMS Bounty Rescue" helicopter camera footage with radio audio (DVIDS 289338): <https://www.dvidshub.net/video/289338/hms-bounty-rescue>
6. U.S. Coast Guard press release, republished by Vertical Mag (Oct. 30, 2012): <https://verticalmag.com/press-releases/21997-video-u-s-coast-guard-rescues-14-from-hms-bounty-html/>
7. gCaptain, quoting U.S. Coast Guard updates: <https://gcaptain.com/bounty-abandons-ship-heavy-seas/>
8. Reuters (Oct. 29, 2012): <https://www.reuters.com/article/markets/crew-rescued-from-hms-bounty-as-hurricane-rages-captain-missing-idUSL1E8LT1Q3/>
9. U.S. Coast Guard photos by Petty Officer 2nd Class Tim Kuklewski (DVIDS 1123953, 1123954): <https://www.dvidshub.net/image/1123953> · <https://www.dvidshub.net/image/1123954>
10. NASA Scientific Visualization Studio 11123, GOES-14 imagery of Hurricane Sandy (NASA/NOAA GOES Project): <https://svs.gsfc.nasa.gov/11123>
11. Radio and intercom lines are quoted from the original audio of DVIDS 289338. They were transcribed and then checked against the recording by ear. All times are Eastern Daylight Time.
12. Author: Notice Nearby (publisher@noticenearby.com), Record of Sale, LLC. An American-made film and account. Support your Neighbor.
13. Not legal advice. Not a newspaper. Not Legal Publication. Record of Sale, LLC (Oregon).