

Wednesday

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The Hour

Serving Central Fairfield County

Weather

Clear tonight, 40s;
Thursday sunny, 60s.

20 Cents

Sea Crash Follow Up—

Anatomy of a Rescue... Tiny Light & Training

BY CHRIS MACKENZIE

A tiny light, no bigger than a fuse head, activated when its attached wiring drags in the sea water, saved the life of two local women early this month when the Antilles Air Boats they were riding crashed into the ocean between St. Croix

and St. John in the Caribbean. The story was in the Friday, April 21, Home/Town Section of The Hour.



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June Clark of Ridgefield and Flip Blair, along with five other survivors, were picked up after four hours in the water, some of it after dark, because searchers in one of the boats spotted a glimmer of light on a passenger's life jacket.

The tiny beams operate miraculously by chemistry instead of batteries, needing only the saline solution of the ocean to activate them.

The lives of the two women and those of the other rescued passengers were saved by more than a chemical miracle, however. Mrs. Clark and Mrs. Blair are both former American Airlines stewardesses, well trained in Stewardess School in what to do in event of an airborne emergency.

Mrs. Blair particularly knew the

Antilles Air Boat in which they were flying quite well. It was she who was able to reach the hatch, pull it open and make way for the passengers to exit unceremoniously.

Mrs. Clark, with no time to don a life jacket, still had the presence of mind to grab her flotation seat cushion, required on all over-water airplanes, and collect several more as they floated out. The act saved her own life as well as that of at least one more passenger.

Both women received their stewardess training in the days before the new American Airlines Stewardess College in Dallas-Fort Worth had been opened. Even then, however, training was strict and to the point in how to handle emergency situations, training which stood them in good stead last month, years later.

Nowadays, flight attendants, both men and women, who are to be assigned to over-water flights get even more rigid training. They are taught actual ditching techniques, how to help passengers out of a downed plane and how to launch life rafts and other necessary equipment.

And it is not all theoretical training either. They use a mock-up of a plane's cabin, ditching into a large indoor swimming pool at the college so that, on the very rare chance that it could happen on one of their flights, the attendants can react instinctively to save lives.

So it was a combination of many things that saved those seven lives, a tiny miracle lamp, life jackets that work both by cartridge and by mouth, flotation cushions, emergency training, presence of mind, and the devotion of hundreds of people who searched long and faithfully to find them.



PAT JOHNSTONE of Wilton, a former American Airlines stewardess of only a few years ago, demonstrates the kind of life jacket that saved the lives of Flip Blair and June Clark this month. Her right hand holds the pipe by which the jacket can be inflated by mouth if the gas released by cartridge does not last long enough. Her left hand is pointing out the emergency light attached to the jacket and activated by the sea water. Photo by MacKenzie.