



*Pictured L-R: NCOA President Paul Kingsbury, BM1 Wallace C. Qual, Kendra Qual, Command Master Chief Lucas Pullen, NCOA Chairman of the Board Terry Haines, and MCPO (Ret) Kevin Isherwood of GEICO Military.*

The 2021 NCOA Coast Guard Vanguard Award, sponsored by GEICO Military, was presented to Boatswain's Mate First Class Wallace C. Qual in honor and memory of Medal of Honor recipient Signalman First Class Douglas Munro.

Petty Officer First Class Qual distinguished himself by exemplifying selfless and heroic actions in the face of life threatening danger on the evening of September 7, 2020, when weather conditions along the central Oregon coast began to quickly deteriorate. Winds that had remained relatively calm throughout the day began to rapidly increase. Smoke and ash clouds from forest fires in the Willamette Valley descended on the coastline reducing visibility to less than 100 yards and making normal breathing difficult.

Just before midnight, watch-standers at U.S. Coast Guard Sector North Bend received a distress call from the fishing vessel *Legend* which had run aground with one person on board and was beginning to take on water two nautical miles south of Newport. Upon receipt of the distress call, a crew from U.S. Coast Guard Station Yaquina Bay launched the "47268", a 47' motor lifeboat, to render assistance. Disoriented due to the severe weather conditions, the vessel's captain mistakenly reported his initial position as being inside the jetty tips. At 0009, after searching the area inside the Yaquina Bay jetties, it became apparent that the initial search information was incorrect.

Battling sustained winds of 45 knots and gusts exceeding 60 knots, the crew of the motor lifeboat began pushing outbound in search of the fishing vessel. Upon the

instruction of the motor lifeboat, the vessel captain lit off two distress flares which helped direct the lifeboat to the location of the fishing vessel. Once the location was confirmed, a MH65 dolphin helicopter was launched from the Newport Air Facility to attempt to hoist the mariner from the vessel. However, due to the extreme winds, it was deemed unsafe to deploy a rescue swimmer to the water and the helicopter was forced to land back at the Newport Air Facility. Simultaneously, a beach rescue team of BM1 Qual, BM1 Hylkema, MK2 Robbins, BM2 Hurst, and BM3 Roque deployed from U.S. Coast Guard Station Yaquina Bay to attempt a rescue from the shore.

At 0030 the lifeboat pushed outbound across the Yaquina Bay bar and navigated along the south reef to the location of the *Legend*. Due to extreme shoaling close to shore and 6-8 foot steep swells inside the reef, the lifeboat was unable to navigate close enough to the vessel to safely remove the captain. At 0043 the captain of the *Legend* radioed that the waves were beginning to tear his boat apart and that the water was up to the alternators and his engine room was filling up fast. Moments later the lights on the vessel went dark. With the beach rescue team enroute, the lifeboat began launching M127 illumination flares to direct the beach party to the location of the floundering vessel. At 0100, the motor lifeboat contacted the vessel's captain over the radio and instructed him to don his survival suit and illuminate his emergency locator beacon so that he could be found if forced to abandon his vessel

Shortly afterwards, he radioed that his windows had shattered, and the doors had been ripped off of their hinges by the pounding waves. As the vessel continued to break apart, the captain attempted to climb up the remains of his mast and grab the vessel's Emergency Position Indicating Radio Beacon to aid in his location if swept out to sea.

At 0129, beset by 10 foot breaking waves, the *Legend's* captain was forced to abandon his vessel and enter the water. During this time, the beach rescue crew had been running along the beach in 40 knots of wind, fully outfitted with survival gear and rescue equipment, for two miles. As they neared the *Legend*, they heard the report from the lifeboat that the captain had been forced to abandon ship and was now in the water struggling to keep above the waves.

At 0130 Petty Officer Qual, displaying extraordinary heroism, made the decision to enter the water and swim out to the captain. Vectored in by the lifeboat offshore and assisted by the other members of the beach crew, Qual made a first attempt to reach the captain through the 6' to 8' foot breaks and a significant longshore current. Qual identified the captain had become trapped in a heavy southerly current, and the team would need to reposition. After returning to the beach and running south to set up ahead of where the captain was drifting, Petty Officer Qual reentered the surf and was able to swim out and make contact with the captain. Utilizing previously communicated line signals and battling grueling winds and currents, Petty Officer Qual and the exhausted captain were pulled back to shore by the beach crew. Finally at 0136, with the assistance of the remainder of the beach team, the vessel captain was safely pulled out of the water with no reported injuries. All members of the crew are applauded for their bravery and valiant efforts in saving the life of the captain.

Petty Officer Qual's actions embody the selfless bravery of the very best the U.S. Coast Guard has to offer. His quick actions and unwavering professionalism exemplify Coast Guard core values and are of the lineage of Signalmen First Class Douglas Munro.

