

SOS DISTRESS LIGHT SAVES TWO SPORT FISHERMEN IN THE GULF OF MEXICO

As told by Michael Misianowycz to Cathie Trogdon at Weems & Plath

On January 5, 2017, Michael Misianowycz (31-year Army veteran) and a buddy with limited boat-handling experience, departed Mobile, Alabama on an offshore, overnight tuna fishing trip. The crew of two aboard *Altered States*, a World Cat 25-foot center console power boat, departed in the early morning from the Fort Morgan boat ramp intending to return Jan 6 about 2:00 pm. When his wife didn't hear from Michael by 5:00 pm on Jan 6, she contacted the U.S. Coast Guard (USCG) as she and Michael had agreed and per his float plan that he had registered on the HiltonsOffshore.com website.

The USCG, after searching for cell and satellite phone activity and after sending local police to confirm Michael's truck/trailer were still at the marina, dispatched a Search and Rescue (SAR) airplane. They started at the farthest waypoint on his float plan (96-miles offshore) and worked back towards shore. The cloud ceiling was low; they were flying at 800-1000 feet. At about 10-miles out, the USCG spotted a light blinking SOS and contacted Michael via VHF handheld. The SOS Distress Light was turned on and the USCG air crew spotted it using their night vision goggles.

After circling the boat for an hour and a half, the SAR airplane had to return to shore because one of their engines was icing up. Conditions when first spotted on Jan 6 at 10:40

pm: 30-kt winds, 8-11 ft seas, wind chill 28° F, water temp 66° F. There was water sloshing on the deck, but they were still afloat. They were moving so that the boat would remain upright and not launch off the wave tops. His crew could not steer in the bad conditions, which prevented Michael from using safety devices like his Sat phone (they couldn't get out of the canopy for a clear signal). Water in the boat had also knocked out the batteries, so his fixed-mount VHF failed.



Altered States; Photo courtesy of Michael Misianowycz.

After the airplane departed, Michael continued slowly towards shore at about four-knots. His crew pumped water out of the boat using a portable bilge pump that was on board. They intended to make it to shore on their own, but the weather continued to deteriorate. When they were about three-miles out (about an hour and a half after the plane had departed), near Sand Island Light House, the boat listed 60° and was broadside to the waves. Michael knew they were in a very dangerous situation, so they began to deploy their six-man life raft. They knew that a USCG vessel was approaching because they could hear voices on the handheld radio, but the USCG could not hear them. Michael set off two flares at about five minutes apart so the USCG could locate them quickly; they were rescued within moments of their last flare deployment. The boat capsized almost immediately after the USCG vessel (a 45-foot, Metal Shark) picked them up.

Michael said the KEY ITEMS he had with him were: 1) the SOS Distress Light, 2) a handheld floating VHF radio, and 3) a portable electric bilge pump/box (he built the system).



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