

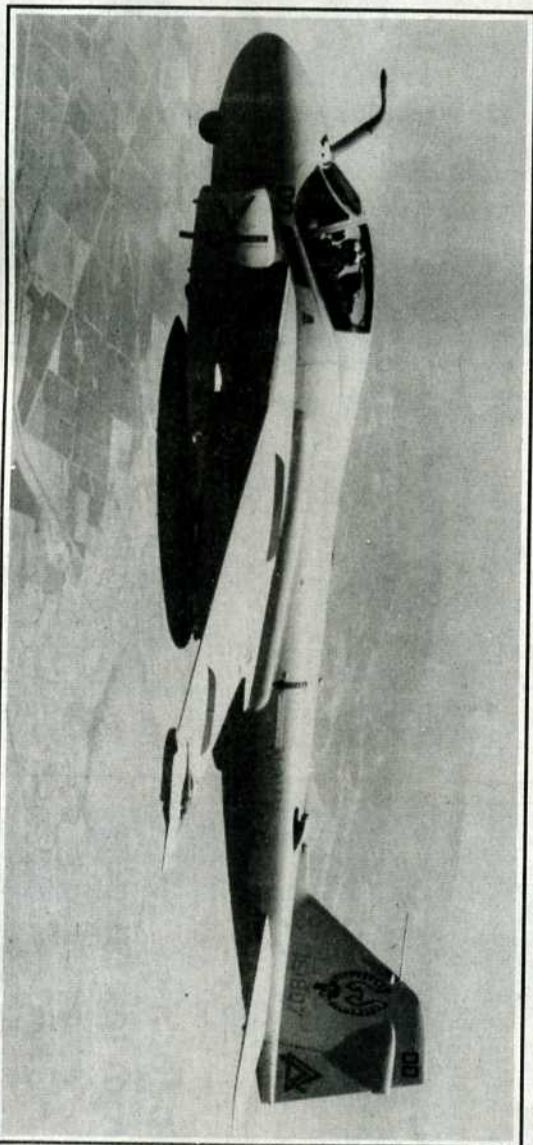
THE **AVIATOR**

NAVAL AIR STATION ALAMEDA, CALIFORNIA

Heroic rescue attempt after plane crashes

By *David Kashimba*

A few minutes before noon on April 5, Express III boat captain, Edward Esch, and first mate, Eddie Matz, had just dropped off some crewmembers to the Texaco ship Star Massachusetts which was anchored in San Francisco Bay, approximately 5,000 feet from the shores of NAS Alameda. Esch is one of the owners of Marine Express Incorporated, a launch service that transports crewmembers, customs, immigration, supplies and parts to ships in the bay. After dropping off the crew, they backed about 50 feet away from the Star Massachusetts and waited until the next group of crewmembers was ready to go ashore. Esch, a commercial pilot with 5,000 flight hours, was topside watching two A-6 Intruder aircraft returning for fleet carrier-landing practice at NAS. Matz was below.



When an A-6 Intruder aircraft crashed into San Francisco Bay on April 5, Edward Esch and Eddie Matz, onboard Express III, were first on the scene to pull the pilot out of the water. The other crewman was pulled out by Kevin Thomson who arrived in a separate boat moments later.

those airplanes. "These guys are making their turns at about 45 degrees," said Esch.

Esch lost sight of one of the A-6s as it touched down on runway 31, but saw him again when he lifted off. As the pilot started to make his turn, Esch began to worry.

right," said Esch, who noticed that the A-6's wings had tipped at more than 45 degrees. "There appeared to be a valiant effort on the pilot's part to straighten out his wings and, for a moment, he straightened his aircraft partially, but then it snapped back."

had just gone inverted," Matz said.

When the A-6 was within 150 to 175 feet from the water, the boat operators opened their engines to full power. "I knew he wasn't going to make it," said Esch.

They were halfway there

Memorial Services

Memorial services for Lieutenant Commanders Brian McMahan and Randall McNally II will be held Friday, April 15, at 2 p.m. at the Naval Air Station Chapel.

Four A-6 Intruder aircraft, two from VA-165 and two from VA-128 based at Whidbey Island, WA, will conduct a Missing Man Formation Fly-By immediately following the memorial service. The Missing Man Formation is a naval aviation tradition, flown in memory of a fallen comrade.

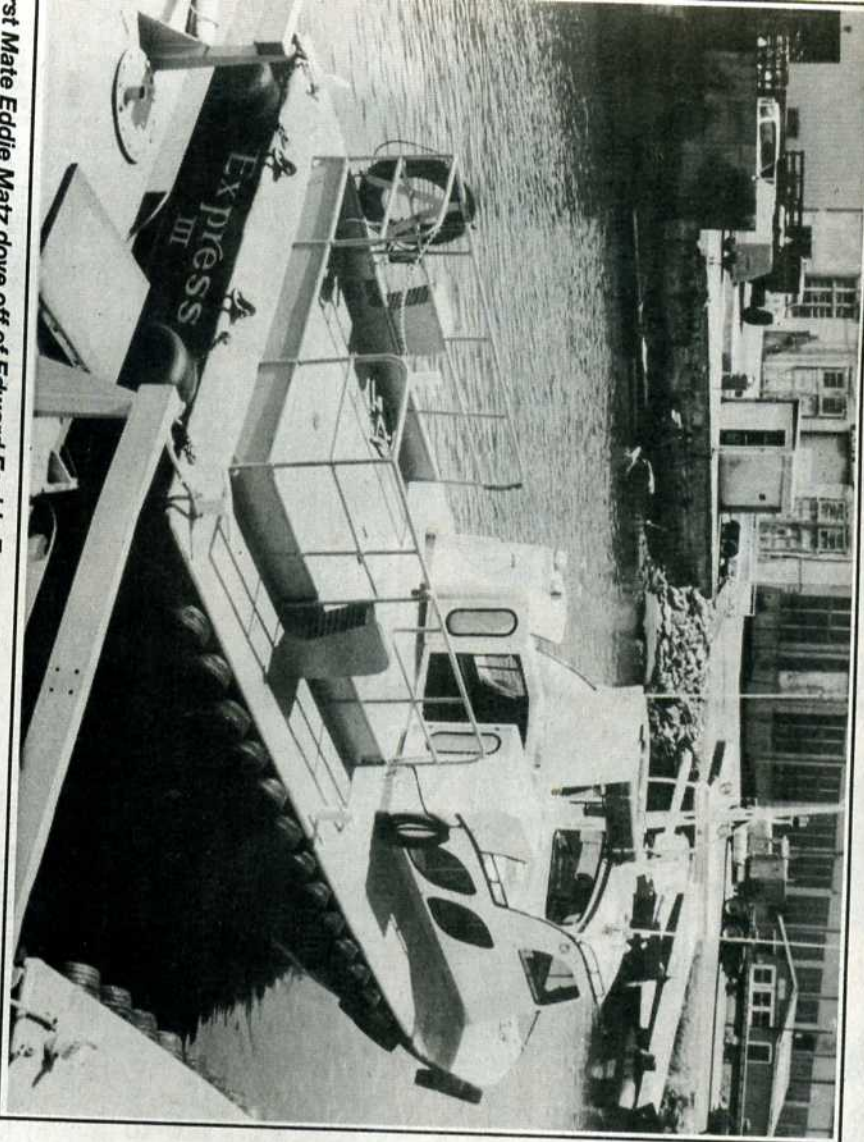
There will be an honor guard, bugler and a 21-gun salute in honor of the two crewmembers.

In response to requests, donations to the McNally family may be made to Emmett Morrissey Childhood Leukemia Fund, First National Bank, 1300 Meadow Road, Northbrook, IL 60062. Attn: Matt Hein Account No. 601-6191

"I said to Eddie, 'Look at

"Something didn't look

"As I came inside the plane



1st Mate Eddie Matz dove off of Edward Esch's Express III to pull Lt. Cmdr. Brian R. McMahon from the bay. (Photo by David Kashimba)

When they saw the A-6's left wing like the water.

"The left wing broke off," Esch said. "Then the fuselage hit and right wing broke off. The impact was followed with a lifted explosion, a yellow-orange flame like a flash fire, and jet-colored smoke," said Esch. As we pulled up to the cockpit, I saw one piece of wreckage," Matz said. "The last thing I saw was the fuselage coming from the sinking fuselage coming up, and I could see the jet fuel on the water."

off and put my PFD (personal flotation device) on," Matz said.

"We saw one pilot about 20 yards off our starboard side," Esch said. "The other was 40 to 50 yards off our port. I saw the life vest for a second on the closer pilot and three to four feet of his parachute. But the chute was caught in the current and started dragging him under, so I told Eddie to go for him."

Matz dove into the fuel slick and swam towards the parachute.

"I pulled on one end of the

him, he went back to helping Matz tie McMahon to one of the cleats on the side of their boat.

"When I got him alongside the boat, I knew there was nothing we could do for him," Matz said. "Our boat was sitting too high out of the water. There was no way we could get him on board."

"We tied him so he was out of the water from the waist up," Esch said. "We couldn't get him out any further because his parachute was still out there in the current, pulling him down."

As Matz climbed out of the water, he looked up to see an H-53 from NAS' helicopter squadron HM-15 hovering overhead.

"I just looked up and shrugged my shoulders," said Matz. "There was nothing more we could do."

When Kevin Thomson, a minister with the Unification Church in Berkeley, heard Esch yell in the direction of his boat, he had already been rushing to the scene. He and his small party, including five children from his church, had just returned from a fishing trip to San Pablo Bay when they witnessed the accident. He spotted Lt. Cmdr. Randall F. McNally II in the water.

"He was floating, but his head was under water," said Thomson, who maneuvered his boat alongside McNally so that he and his deck hand could pull the A-6 pilot's head out of the water.

Coast Guard vessel.

"I didn't see any parachute attached to the naval officer," Thomson said. "But his wet equipment made him very heavy."

The Coast Guard transported McNally to Yerba Buena Island where paramedics performed CPR to no avail.

A 45-foot Boston Whaler from NAS Alameda's oil response team soon arrived on the scene to survey the jet fuel that had spewed into the water. The four-man crew, supervised by BMI Willis Powell, assisted Matz and Esch in transporting McMahon to a second Coast Guard vessel.

But before McMahon could be lifted aboard the Coast Guard vessel, his parachute had to be cut away. Two men from the San Francisco Fire Department arrived on a jet ski to assist. Then Navy divers arrived on the scene from NAS Alameda's SIMA dive locker. The divers were able to cut the rest of the parachute lines, enabling the Port Services and Coast Guard crews to lift McMahon aboard the Coast Guard vessel which then transported him to Yerba Buena Island.

"I didn't feel like I did anything," Matz said. "We arrived on the scene so quickly, I had my hopes up that we might be able to save these guys. But when I pulled the one pilot up, my adrenalin started wearing off."

"We were there in less than a minute," Esch said. "We would