

REGION

Virginia Beach sailor plays key role in rescue

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Nighttime off the North Carolina coast on Jan. 2, some 300 miles out to sea.

Snow falling. Ice chunks smacking against the helicopter. Seas rising past 20 feet.

Down below, a boater in a life raft who couldn't wait for help. And just above, Navy Petty Officer 2nd Class Kyle Need, poised to put his skills as a rescue swimmer to very good use.

Need, a 25-year-old Virginia Beach native who grew up swimming and surfing, was part of a team from the aircraft carrier USS Dwight D. Eisenhower that worked with the Coast Guard to rescue a Missouri man whose boat had run afoul of rough seas.

The Eisenhower, which had deployed earlier in the day from Naval Station Norfolk, had received a call for assistance from the Coast Guard. That eventually brought Need and his team into the picture — the "Nightdippers" of Helicopter Anti-Submarine Squadron 5.

Ideally, Need would have flown out

to the scene and been lowered directly onto the life raft that held Dennis Clements. Clements had struggled to reach the life raft — which came courtesy of the Coast Guard — after abandoning his boat.

The rough seas made a pinpoint landing impossible.

"My crew chief lowered me as close as we possibly could," Need said. "It was about 10 yards to the raft, and there were quite a few waves knocking me around a bit. It knocked the snorkel and mask off my head."

But he righted himself and reached Clements.

In all, he was in the water only six minutes.

The co-pilot on the search-and-rescue helicopter credited Need and the rest of the Coast Guard-Navy team with maintaining focus in the face of everything Mother Nature threw at them.

"I didn't hear one bit of panic in anybody's voice," said Cmdr. Byron Ogden. "The whole crew was very calm, cool and collected."

USS Dwight D. Eisenhower public affairs contributed to this story.