

Navy Sailors, Divers Find and Salvage Downed F-16C Aircraft

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VIRGINIA BEACH, Va. (NNS) -- Navy Sailors and Divers from Mobile Diving and Salvage Unit (MDSU) 2, embarked aboard the Navy's rescue and salvage ship USNS Grasp (T-ARS-51), found and salvaged a downed F-16 aircraft off the coast of Virginia, Aug. 6-20.

The downed aircraft was one of two F-16 fighter jets from the 113th Wing, D.C. Air National Guard that clipped wings mid-air during a routine training mission 35 miles southeast of Chincoteague, Va., Aug. 1.

The other aircraft involved in the incident was able to fly back to Joint Base Andrews in Md. without further incident.

The MDSU 2 Area Search Platoon (ASP) 201 departed Virginia Beach Aug. 6 and began seven days of search operations to find the aircraft. Staging out of Chincoteague Island, Va., the team of six Navy Sailors, led by Operations Specialist Chief William Earp, conducted both towed and autonomous side-scan sonar searches of more than 10 square miles of ocean bottom, before locating the F-16 approximately three miles from the point of the mid-air incident.

On Aug. 14, the MDSU 2 ASP found and recovered aircraft debris using a remote operated vehicle. With the crash site located, the ASP turned over the operation to Navy Divers from Mobile Diving and Salvage (MDS) Company 2-4 who arrived on Grasp after a small-boat transfer.

The MDS Company 2-4 divers began surface-supplied diving operations Aug. 16 and recovered part of the aircraft from the ocean floor by using a basket to raise large pieces of the jet from a depth of 107 feet. The next day, the divers recovered the flight data recorder, commonly referred to as the "black box."

Diving operations ended Aug. 19 after recovering key debris. The remnants of the aircraft and the flight data recorder are being transferred to Joint Base Andrews for examination by the Air Force's Safety Investigation Board.

"I'd like to thank the Sailors, Navy Divers and Civilian Mariners for their cooperation and expertise at locating and recovering the aircraft, including the flight data recorder," said Brig. Gen. Marc Sasseville, commander, 113th Wing, D.C. Air National Guard. "These key items will help us to understand what happened and what we can do to prevent a similar occurrence."

MDSU 2 is an expeditionary mobile unit homeported at Joint Expeditionary Base, Little Creek-Ft. Story in Virginia Beach, Va., and has successfully conducted salvage operations to support TWA Flight 800, Swiss Air Flight 111, the space shuttles Challenger and Columbia, the I-35W Mississippi River bridge collapse in Minnesota, the Civil War ironclad USS Monitor, and recovery of a down military jet off the coast of Italy.

USNS Grasp is crewed by U.S. Navy's Military Sealift Command (MSC), which operates approximately 110 noncombatant, U.S. Navy civilian-crewed ships that replenish U.S. Navy ships, conduct specialized missions, strategically preposition combat cargo at sea around the world, and move military cargo and supplies used by deployed U.S. forces and coalition partners.

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130816-N-HN353-154 ATLANTIC OCEAN (Aug. 16, 2013) Divers assigned to Mobile and Diving Salvage Unit (MDSU) 2, Company 2-4, are lowered into the water during diving operations off the coast of Virginia to recover the wreckage of an F-16 Fighting Falcon that crashed Aug. 1. The divers are embarked aboard the Military Sealift Command rescue and salvage ship USNS Grasp (T-ARS-51) recovering the wreckage. (U.S. Navy photo by Mass Communication Specialist 1st Class Ernesto Hernandez Fonte/Released)

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