

The Officers, Directors and Members of  
US SAILING  
are pleased to present the  
ARTHUR B. HANSON RESCUE MEDAL  
to  
SUNNY BEACH  
for the rescue as follows:

The Hall family was sailing out of San Francisco Bay under reefed sails in a chartered 36-foot Beneteau 373 sloop. As they approached the bridge, 14-year-old Ethan saw a splash in the water about 300 yards ahead. Thinking it might be a whale spout, the family sailed in closer as they noticed pedestrians on the bridge approximately 245 feet overhead on the Golden Gate Bridge pointing down to the water. The Halls sailed toward the area until a police boat appeared, racing toward a plume of smoke from a flare near what appeared to be a body. The search had apparently become an obligation to recover this body in the water. As the boat turned toward the victim, the Halls heard sounds from the person floating in the water, who turned out to be a teenage girl.

“We knew we wanted to get hold of what ended up being a “jumper” and stabilized her in the water so she wouldn’t drown before the Coast Guard arrived,” explained Merle. There was no way to know if there was any spinal injury. “Once we got hold of her, we stopped the boat and kept her afloat, but also very still so we didn’t hurt her. This is not your typical man-overboard procedure.”

With Ethan serving as spotter, Merle brought the boat’s Lifesling rescue device on deck and Eric threw a horseshoe life ring in the water, which blew away. After deciding that the Lifesling would not work with a helpless victim, the Halls started the engine, dropped the sails, and motored to the victim. Eric stood on the stern boarding platform and reached out to the victim with a boat hook and pulled her to the boat. They were concerned about causing further damage to the young woman by trying to pull her on board. Merle went below and called the Coast Guard, 15-year-old Henry steered the boat into the wind. While Eric held the girl’s head above water, Ethan held the boathook, keeping the half-drowned, unconscious woman close by but safely away from the turning propeller. When Merle reported that a Coast Guard boat was on the way, Ethan prepared to signal with the boat’s emergency flares.

The Coast Guard boat soon appeared out of a group of several boats looking for the girl at the north end of the bridge. The Coast Guard took the girl on board, and raced to Sausalito, where she was sent to Marin General Hospital. The girl, a 16-year-old from Los Angeles, survived the fall from the Golden Gate Bridge

US Sailing awarded the Arthur B. Hanson Rescue Medal to sailors Merle Hall (Walnut Creek, Calif.), his son Eric Hall (Alamo, Calif.) and grandsons Henry and Ethan Hall (Alamo, Calif.) for rescuing a woman on San Francisco Bay who was floating under the Golden Gate Bridge in the early morning of April 17, 2011.

Dr. Gino Bottino, MD  
Chairman, Safety at Sea Committee  
By Direction

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**Nomination Form**

Submission 5/11/2011 2:06:03 PM  
Time/Date:

**WHAT HAPPENED?**

Date of Incident Sunday, April 17, 2011

What was the nature of this Incident? Rescued person who jumped from Bridge

What happened? On the morning of April 17th, three generations of the Hall family were on a chartered sailboat proceeding westerly on a starboard tack towards Fort Point at the south footing of the Golden Gate Bridge. Skipper Merle Hall (grandfather), Eric Hall (father), and Henry and Ethan Hall (grandsons aged 15 and 14) were onboard the 36' sloop, chartered the day before from Olympic Circle Sailing Club, in Berkeley, CA. The four had spent the previous night anchored in Sausalito. In search of wind, they departed Sausalito early Sunday and headed for a bank of fog rolling in under the Gate. The wind picked up considerably as they sliced through the shipping lane. They reefed. They were the only sailboat under the GG Bridge that morning. 14-year-old Ethan spotted a splash under the bridge, some 300 yards away. He thought it might be a whale spout and told the others the splash reached high above the whitecaps. Without initially seeing any whale, they held course, starboard tack to Fort Point. A couple minutes later, they tacked back to a port tack that would intersect the bridge just north of the south footing (south of mid-span). As they neared the south footing, where Ethan had spotted the splash, they noticed that the normally friendly pedestrians on the bridge 245-feet above were pointing

and seemed particularly animated. The Halls – thinking perhaps the pedestrians spotted the whale - followed the direction provided by the people, who were barely visible in the fog. With reefed sails, the sailors fell off to a beam reach, parallel and inside the Gate, and cut across the flood. About  $\frac{3}{4}$ 's of a nautical mile away, at the north tower of the bridge, the Halls spotted a police boat racing toward a small plume of smoke rising from the water (a flare). The Halls then began to realize that perhaps they should be looking for someone who fell or jumped off the bridge, as inconceivable as it seemed at the time, instead of a whale. A tense search, at maximum flood tide, ensued. With Eric at the helm, all eyes scanned the water – Henry to port, Ethan to starboard, Merle ahead and Eric scanning across all. Merle and Henry thought they spotted something odd to starboard (although Henry was on the port quarter). Eric turned the boat on their direction to a deep broad reach (still port tack), but only a bird rose up out of the darkness and rushed off into the wind. Merle and Henry both said what they saw was not a bird, but they didn't know what it was and could not see it anymore. Eric reached to port, and a minute later Eric spotted a body adrift on its back, mostly awash in the water, two boat lengths to windward. All hands could see its head bob out of the waves – and an otherwise pale face was covered in blood. Another wave washed over the face and the blood was gone – washed away. The person appeared to be dead and the sailors considered how to get hold of the body. In a modified quick-stop MOB maneuver, they turned upwind to close haul, almost in irons, when they were stunned to hear the body moan. The sailors then realized they were in a rescue situation – not a recovery. Merle and Henry quickly blew the jib and depowered the main while Eric steered toward the body. Eric told Ethan to spot – to maintain constant sight of the body while pointing at it with an outstretched arm. Ethan did exactly that. Merle jumped below to retrieve the Lifesling. Meanwhile, Eric threw the horseshoe at the body, which was hanging just under the surface of the water, awash in the waves, motionless, its legs bent under it in an uncharacteristic way. The horseshoe floated by it and was blown along in the wind. Everyone thought the person's back must have been broken – and body crushed from the fall – she was unconscious. It was clear the Lifesling would be useless even if they could deploy it in those wind and sea conditions (15-knot winds, moderate seas, whitecaps and some spray, reefed sails, plus 4.8-knot maximum flood current in a light fog). Then quickly, working as a team, they started the engine and dropped the sails, motoring to help maintain their position; Merle at the helm. The boat's high freeboard acted like a sail, making it difficult to hold position relative to the partially submerged body – they didn't want to blow down on it or go around again. With the body now in reach, 14-yr old Ethan retrieved the boat hook and handed it to his father (Eric), who by now had jumped down onto the dive platform at the stern. Lying across the platform, one

hand holding the boat, Eric was able to reach the body with the boat hook in his other hand, and pull it toward him. Merle shifted the boat into neutral, so the body would not be sucked into the prop. When Eric grabbed the body, he quickly passed the boat hook back up to his son, Ethan. Henry took the helm and held the boat in irons while Merle jumped below and radioed the Coast Guard. They had already decided against hauling the body out of the frigid, 53-degree water, fearing they would cause more damage to the injured person if they tried. They were counting on the Coast Guard's quick arrival. Eric held the person above water and reassured her help was on the way – it would be ok. Half-drowned, the person vomited bloody sea water and moaned once every half-minute or so. Eric held the head above water and talked reassuringly, even though she never moved, opened her eyes or spoke. He hoped she could understand she was not alone. Merle reported the Coast Guard was enroute to their position and replaced Henry at the helm. Meanwhile, Ethan had retrieved emergency flares to help signal the Coast Guard, if necessary. The Coast Guard arrived a couple minutes later, approaching from the north end of the bridge where five or six emergency vessels had gathered in a search. Eric advised the Coast Guard crew the person was alive but unconscious. The Coast Guard maneuvered close, pulled the person out of the water, and took off for Sausalito. The Halls did not know if she would survive. Merle Hall spoke with the Coast Guard that evening and learned they had transferred the girl to Marin General Hospital still alive. The next day, the Halls learned the jumper was a 16-year-old girl from LA who had left a suicide note. They were very happy to hear on the news she was expected to recover.

**OBSERVATIONS/LEARNINGS for future rescues of GG bridge jumpers:**

- **GUIDANCE FROM BRIDGE PEDESTRIANS:** The sailors would never have spotted the mostly submerged body without the help of the pedestrians pointing and guiding them from the bridge above. This was a testament to the sailors' awareness of their surroundings and the thoughtfulness of the good Samaritans on the bridge.
- **IMMEDIACY OF RETRIEVAL:** Even though the jumper had miraculously survived the impact of the fall, she would not have lasted much longer in the water. She was mostly submerged when they first spotted her, and she would have slipped below the surface soon due to injuries and lack of consciousness. It was absolutely critical that someone was immediately there to keep the jumper afloat.
- **QUICK-STOP RECOVERY:** Although not a common MOB rescue method, several combined elements created conditions that were ideal for this method in this instance: (1) these were moderate wind and sea conditions at max flood under the Gate, (2) combined with the poor maneuverability common to that model boat, and (3) the position of the boat relative to the victim at first sighting (reaching on a port tack, two boat lengths below the unconscious body). In this instance, the modified quick-stop worked well. Although we improvised, our sharp left turn into the wind halted our

forward motion. Also, because the victim was unconscious, buoyancy devices were essentially made useless. — COAST GUARD SPEED: The quick response of the Coast Guard to the Hall family's radio call for help was vital to the success of the rescue.

Event City	San Francisco Bay
Event State	California
Body of Water	San Francisco Bay, near the Golden Gate Bridge
Day or Night?	Day
Air Temperature	58
Water Temperature	53
Wind Speed	16-18 knots
Wave Height	1-3 feet

**VICTIM(S):**

---- Victim 1 ----

Name and Home Town (City, State)

Not Available - not released by US Coast Guard

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---- Rescuing Boat #1 ----

Skipper's Name

Merle Hall

Crew's Names and function each performed in the rescue:

Eric Hall, helm, deployed horseshoe buoy, held victim afloat Henry Hall, helm, de-powered sails Ethan Hall, spotter, retrieved boat hook and flares

Boat Make & Model

Beneteau 373

Boat Name

Sunny Beach

Boat Length 36 feet

### Overboard Specific Questions

What recovery method was used (Quickstop, Reach Method, Figure 8, etc)?	modified Quickstop, dousing sails/using engine
Did the victim's boat lose sight of the victim?	not after first sighting
What search pattern was used?	Using pedestrian witnesses on the bridge
Was a rescue swimmer put in the water Y/N?	No
Did the victim have a strobe light, a light or whistle?	No
What color clothes were visible above the water?	None
Was the victim able to help in the recovery?	No
In what way?	
How did the victim get hoisted from the water level up onto the deck?	wasn't pulled aboard by the Halls. kept airway clear but left in the water due to worries about further injury.
Was any injury sustained by the victim?	Yes
What type (hypothermia included)?	several injuries were noticeable, internal bleeding, possible broken limbs, hypothermia, vomiting blood.
Was a Lifesling aboard?	Yes
Was it used?	No
How much time did the victim spend in the water?	20 minutes or more total

### Outside Assistance

Did a Mayday call go out?

Yes

Who responded?

US Coast Guard

**Nominator's Information**

Name

Richard Jepsen

Do you give permission to have this story published?

Yes