

Coast Guard to the Rescue

By YN1 Kirby L. Light, USCG,
USCG ISC, Alameda, Calif.

It had been a long, hot, tiring day for YN3 Tamyca Lucas and me. We had spent July 1, 2005, doing a household-goods inspection, repack, and reinventory in San Jose and were returning to Alameda. The last thing we wanted to see was Highway 580W traffic coming to a crawl. Nevertheless, that's what was happening.

I slowly proceeded to another lane and saw the problem: a major, single-vehicle accident in which the vehicle had rolled and was upside down. About 15 or 20 frantic civilians were on the scene, with no emergency personnel in sight.

Petty Officer Lucas immediately told me to pull over. As soon as I had worked my way to the shoulder,

she jumped out and ran toward the scene, with a man in a light-blue medical smock in close pursuit, followed by me. The guy in the blue smock disappeared once we arrived at the scene, and we never saw him again.

Once YN3 Lucas was at the accident site, she quickly assessed the situation. She noticed that a young, larger lady in a green medical smock was trying to care for a toddler (3 years old, as we would learn) still inside the crashed vehicle. The child was hanging upside down from her car seat, with blood on her head (from three cuts, as we eventually would learn), and she was screaming. Seeing that the lady couldn't reach far enough inside the vehicle to render the necessary aid to the toddler, YN3 Lucas ran to help.



Putting aside her own physical exhaustion and personal danger, YN3 Lucas forced her head and both arms into the rear passenger-side window of the crushed, unstable vehicle. She then held the cervical-spine while the other lady applied pressure to the child's cuts. Unfortunately, the lady only could get one arm (up to the elbow) inside, and, because she had to turn her head sideways to reach even that far, she had to rely on directions from YN3 Lucas, who had her own problems. She was standing on the side of a hill, at a 50-to-60-degree angle to the car. While directing the other lady, she also was talking, singing and telling nursery rhymes to the toddler. The youngster subsequently calmed down and quit trying to wiggle out of the car seat.

Meanwhile, I squeezed through the rear-passenger driver-side window, praying that the vehicle wouldn't crush down any more. I wanted to see if I could do anything else for the child. Once I was inside, YN3 Lucas instinctively said, "Don't undo the seat belt. Just call 911." Before backing out of the vehicle to make the call, I checked the child for other cuts or injuries but didn't see any.

I asked a man standing nearby if I could borrow his cellphone to call 911, while simultaneously checking the car for gas leaks or smoke—there were none. I got a recording and was placed on hold when I called 911, so I held onto the phone as I turned my attention to the child's bleeding, crying, and somewhat-hysterical mother. I asked a woman onlooker to hold onto the mother's neck and head and not to let her move while I checked her injuries. She had cuts on her right arm, blood in her hair, and she was crying out for her baby. I let her know her baby was OK, and she immediately calmed down.

Meanwhile, I still was on hold for the 911 operator, so I moved to the child's father. He was lying on his left side, sobbing and holding his right arm and shoulder, which he indicated had been injured. He wasn't bleeding, and I couldn't see any protruding broken bones, so I told him to lie still while I found someone to sit with him. As soon as I had located another woman to stay with him, I went back to check on YN3 Lucas' situation.

I still was on hold for the 911 operator when I spotted an 18-wheeler down the road. I hurried to where it was, climbed on board, and asked the driver to get on his radio and request an ambulance. At this point, the 911 operator finally came on the line. I quickly identified myself, informed him what had happened, and said we needed an ambulance. He started asking me questions, none of which I could

hear clearly, because of all the traffic noise. When the operator asked me to pinpoint our location, I couldn't help, but an older gentleman right behind me said he could, so I handed him the phone and asked that he provide the information.

I then ran to check on the mother and father—both seemed to be doing OK—so I again headed to the wrecked vehicle to see how YN3 Lucas was doing. As I reached her, a good Samaritan, who appeared only to speak Spanish, had crawled inside the vehicle and was trying to undo the child's seat belt. Petty Officer Lucas demanded that I grab the man's leg and force him to back out of the vehicle.

From there, I went back to the mother and father and, upon seeing them still being cared for, had an opportunity to notice that the chaos was starting to subside. It was interesting to me that, in the midst of so many onlookers, four women and one guy were the only ones who had put forth any effort to bring the situation under control.

Moments later, the first emergency vehicle arrived with two firefighters from the Alameda County Fire Department. I met the woman lieutenant as she got out of the vehicle and briefed her on the situation with the child, while the other firefighter went to care for the toddler's parents. Before I knew it, there were four police cars, one motorcycle policeman, three ambulances, and one or two EMS personnel on the scene, all taking care of the casualties.

Once the child was out of the wrecked vehicle and strapped to a backboard, she started receiving oxygen while being checked more closely for injuries. The ambulances soon were en route to an emergency room with all three casualties. Petty Officer Lucas and I asked a firefighter to hose the blood off us, and, when the police had released us, we took a short break to gather our wits, then got back on the freeway—three hours and 20 minutes after we had stopped.

Petty Officer Lucas and I went directly to base medical and told the OOD and the duty HS what had occurred. They started the procedures we had to follow, which included making a formal statement and having a medical exam.

Two days later, YN3 Lucas called the local children's hospital, where the toddler from the crash scene had been taken for treatment. She learned that the child was in critical but stable condition, thanks to her quick thinking and actions. If she hadn't taken charge like she did, this story likely would have had a much different ending. ■

For more info, go to: http://www.dmv.ca.gov/pubs/brochures/fast_facts/ffd116.htm or <http://www.whereincity.com/medical/articles/131>.