

THE LIFE LINE

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U.S. Coast Guard Auxiliary
East District -Southern Region
Flotilla 23-07 Herring Bay, Maryland

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<https://Flotilla2307.com>

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FLOTILLA HOUSEKEEPING



Like most boaters, Auxiliarists tend to collect many useful and maybe not so useful items. Flotilla 23-07 is no exception and over time has managed to accumulate a lot of material. In the past, most of the flotilla's supplies resided at the home of the leadership or the various staff officers. It fell to them to store all the boating safety handouts as well as survival gear, extra personal flotation devices, and any other miscellaneous equipment the flotilla possessed. A few years ago, it was decided by the membership to rent a storage facility at the Herrington Harbor North Marina in Tracy's Landing, Maryland to keep all of these items in one accessible location.

This idea started out with the best of intentions but as is often the case, things have a way of not quite working out as planned. Simply put, items started to pile up in the shed as the flotilla accumulated more and more Auxiliary material over the years.

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As noted at many a flotilla meeting, some kind of action was needed. Fortunately, with the support of some energetic members, a plan was put in place this year to revitalize the storage arrangement. Auxiliarists Gini Shrift, Kimberle Sheehan, and Joe DiStefano met at the shed in the spring and proceeded to empty everything outside onto the parking lot. It was then determined what was still necessary and what was outdated and needed to be eliminated. Members John Wright and Douglas Smith, after procuring all the framing material, then began to construct the shelving, graciously provided by Paul Manicone, to accommodate the many boxes that contained the remaining supplies and equipment. This process took a few days of hard work but eventually led to a much cleaner and well organized storage locker. Gini Shrift procured some large clear plastic containers to replace the old cardboard shipping boxes and labeled the outsides to indicate their contents.

Flotilla 23-07 can now be especially proud of our renovated storage facility with better access to its materials and equipment. Bravo Zulu to all who made this happen!



United States Coast Guard Auxiliary

BOAT CREW TRAINING “FUN”

If Boat Crew Auxiliarists ask how to make towing evolutions more fun – even cool – then read on. This writer went out on a Maritime Observation Mission with stern tow and side tow training as a principal goal. Not so unusual, except for our towing partner.

August 5 was a sunny, calm day as we arrived for our rendezvous for boat crew training at the waters off Oyster Creek, just north of the entrance to the South River and west of Thomas Point, Maryland. Susanne Smith was coxswain on her Auxiliary facility (OPFAC) with Steve Klein, Ralph Cady and me as crew. As we approached, we saw the distinctive Coast Guard 45 foot response boat (“45”) out of Station Annapolis sitting still in the quiet morning waters. The “45” is a busy, popular vessel seen at many of the regattas in which the Auxiliary participates. Its dominant role, impressive speed and maneuverability, are always notable.

As our OPFAC slowed, the “45” kicked into gear and sidled up alongside. The Senior Chief asked and was welcome to come aboard our vessel. Then he offered for some of our crew to go aboard the “45.” Two of us volunteered immediately and our coxswain generously signaled her approval. I couldn’t believe our luck, but I tried to restrain my excitement and pretend like this was an everyday thing. Indeed, it was a rare chance to experience the evolutions from the vantage of the “45,” and watch how it performed these conventional oft-repeated procedures. The crew on the “45” was as ready and practiced as one would expect and as we Auxiliarists always strive to be. This was the case, despite the fact that there were two very new coasties participating in the training.



45 foot Response Boat (USCG official photograph)

We took our positions near the helm and immediately began to discuss towing experiences with the “45” coxswain, a Boatswain Mate 1, who had lots of experience performing these maneuvers on the open ocean as well as on the “lake,” as he affectionately referred to the Chesapeake Bay. As we began our first tow, a stern tow, he explained how he liked to approach a disabled vessel caught beam-to in large ocean swells, how he evaluated the strength of the vessel’s fittings he would need to use to attach tow lines, and how he would determine the skills of the crew on the disabled vessel, in order to perform his role as safely as possible. As he gave instructions to the two new coasties, they shouted back the commands and followed through. They expertly threw the heaving line with the thick one-inch bridle and tow line attached. This heavy tow line was neatly wrapped on a large spool at the stern; this made it easy to dispense line and adjust length. As we started the tow, the crew assiduously kept the coxswain informed of the tow line catenary and the exact movements and direction of the vessel in tow.

Continued on page 3

BOAT CREW CONTD.

But there was another evolution afoot. The coastie on our OPFAC had put “Oscar,” the dummy we use for Man Overboard (MOB) practice, on the starboard gunnel. While the tow proceeded, he quietly pushed Oscar off the gunnel with a boat hook, wondering if it would go unnoticed. The crew on the “45” immediately called it out, threw over a life ring, and started a turn toward the person in the water (PIW). It was a quick, smooth starboard turn, with our OPFAC still in tow and the crew advising on the position of the towed vessel. The coxswain expertly executed this maneuver, taking full advantage of the agility of the “45” and its twin jet propulsion. He began giving instructions to the two coasties to take their positions on the cleverly designed stepdown on the “45,” which was just above the boat’s waterline and allowed for easy access and retrieval of the PIW. Oscar was grabbed and safely pulled aboard without even a minor perturbation in the towing evolution. The crew was asked about the condition of the PIW, as a matter of course, just as we are taught to do in a real MOB event.

After we broke the tow, the “45” did a side tow of the OPFAC. Then it was our turn, so we reboarded the OPFAC and performed our own towing evolutions of the “45,” which was more of a challenge as it was almost twice our size.



Putting aside the thrill of being aboard the “45” and sharing this experience as “Team Coast Guard,” this opportunity shows the way for more joint training between the Auxiliary and the “Gold side.” One frequent hurdle to getting annual sign-offs for boat crew is the coordination required to get two OPFACs scheduled at the same time, and for enough of these collaborations to occur to give all Auxiliarist boat crew members a chance to fulfill this requirement each year. Planning more of these joint exercises with our active-duty partners will be a welcome augmentation of our training operations.

Of course, this sort of joint exercise does occur from time to time, but making it more common would be very welcome. These experiences can be so valuable to our members as it’s both educational and, in this writer’s view, inspirational. All of my interactions with our active-duty members over my few years as an Auxiliarist have been positive and have only reinforced my conviction about the importance of our mission, the example of our preparedness, and my pride in our service.

Joe DiStefano, FC

PERSONAL WATERCRAFT ACCIDENTS

Personal Watercraft (PWCs) have become extremely popular here in the United States over the last few decades and they are probably one of the most economical power boats available. PWCs function using an inboard jet-propelled engine and are designed to be operated by sitting, kneeling, or standing on the vessel. They are exciting to ride, offering high speeds with extreme maneuverability, and fun to operate on the water. With that enjoyment, however comes a number of special requirements and inherent dangers.

Here in Maryland, PWC operators must be at least 16 years of age, have taken and passed a boating safety class, have a whistle or other sound producing device, a fire extinguisher, utilize a self-circling device or a lanyard-type engine cut-off switch, and always be wearing an approved personal flotation device (PFD) while operating their vessel. PWCs can only be operated between the hours of sunrise to sunset and must in addition, follow all the existing navigation laws and requirements as for any other vessel.

PWC accidents usually result from such situations as collisions due to other vessels, environmental conditions, and mechanical failures. However, the leading cause is typically operator error. Some of the key factors that relate to that are: reckless behavior, inexperience, lack of situational awareness, ignoring safety guidelines and regulations such as not wearing a PFD, and not adhering to posted speed limits. In addition, noise and vibration from the engine as well as glare off of the water can create a situation whereby the operator becomes fatigued and has reduced reaction times equivalent to being intoxicated.

According to the U.S. Coast Guard, PWCs are involved in 30% of all reported boating accidents with 36% of all boating injuries also taking place on PWCs. More injuries and deaths result from PWC collisions than from any other types of accidents, and most importantly, they are more likely to die from blunt-force trauma than from drowning. The best way to reduce PWC accidents is by exercising responsible boating practices.

THE LIFE LINE

It is beneficial to the safety of all boaters that PWC operators always operate their vessel in a reasonable and prudent manner. It will make for a safe and fun experience for all!

F. Voltaggio, FSO-PB

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AWARDS

Jack Kelly - Basically Qualified
Yvette Moore - FEMA 400 Course

PASSING THOUGHT

People who say it cannot be done should not interrupt those who are doing it.

George Bernard Shaw

UPCOMING EVENTS

October 13 - Flotilla meeting, Cedarhurst Community Center, Shady Side, Maryland, 1900

November 10 - Flotilla meeting and annual elections, Cedarhurst Community Center, Shady Side, Maryland, 1900

December 8 - Flotilla meeting and holiday party, Cedarhurst Community Center, Shady Side, Maryland, 1900

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