



Supervisory Marine Interdiction Agent and Instructor Ken Kilroy points out the tactics to expect when the class takes to the water.

up an amazing 25,700 student training hours. Naturally, the high demand means a heavy workload, but it also means small classes so agents receive more one-on-one training.

Instruction is so valuable and comprehensive that members of the U.S. Navy special warfare units, special warfare combat craft operators and the Navy's sea, air and land or SEAL special operations force train at the center.

Vessel commander, marine instructor, tactical boarding officer, marine tactics instructor, small boat interdiction and use-of-force are among the classes in most demand where participants confront multiple law enforcement challenges and practice maneuvers not possible in the field.

At the same time, the center strives to keep courses up-to-date to tackle evolving threats. "If we're not moving ahead, we're moving backwards," Wade said. "I want our marine agents to come through the door and be excited to train. The last thing I want to hear is 'your training is not relevant.'"

Academics and application is balanced and everyone is trained to the same high standard regardless if they patrol the Rio Grande, the Great Lakes or the South Florida coast.

Improving marine units through standard training is central to the center's mission, which delivers a highly skilled and mobile force that can quickly



Hitting moving targets at the right spot can be tricky as Supervisory Marine Interdiction Agent Chris Gallsapy from the Corpus Christi Marine Unit, Texas, takes careful aim.

deploy to any of CBP's marine locations.

Standardization allows regions to do more with limited resources, said Jeff Eccles, a supervisory marine interdiction agent from the Great Lakes Air and Marine Branch taking the vessel commander recertification course. Eccles said his region regularly augments locations in other parts of the country. "You need to rely on those you don't normally work with during the year," he added.

Agents typically spend a half day in class studying the procedures they'll later practice on the water. Settings replicate real-world possibilities, just as the Midnight Express crew confronted during their evening intercept.

Procedures for successful intercepts, for instance, require teamwork and challenge vessel commanders to mentally picture the boat's path, calculate position by course and speed, monitor the radar and listen for headings all at once, said Andres "Andy" Blanco, a supervisory marine interdiction agent and instructor. "Most suspect vessels won't know you're there," he pointed out.

"This job is for people who can think quickly and react," offered Antonio "Tony G" Gammillaro, a supervisory marine interdiction agent from the Miami Marine Unit, taking the vessel commander recertification course. "When you're only feet from someone at night, no lights, it's one of the most challenging jobs in all CBP."



Practicing tactics to safely board a vessel is an important part of the National Marine Training Center's curriculum.

# As real as can be

Tactics to apprehend craft whether for a document check, inspection or for any reason is an important part of the program.

Agents in training chase a craft crewed by instructors playing the suspects who apply all the tricks evaders use to escape. The instructors deliver.

They zigzag. They dodge. They make sharp, abrupt turns, sometimes banking so forcefully the top side of their vessel nearly skims the water. But like a chess game, the pursuers anticipate and thwart each break-away.

Another boat intercepts. The commander maneuvers from one side of the fleeing craft to the other, studying its occupants. That assessment determines the tactics agents will use when boarding a vessel. Throughout the exercise, agents communicate and coordinate and there's a primary boarding officer in charge, Blanco said.

Then it begins again. Another crew becomes the bad guys and another vessel commander takes the interceptor's helm.

To ensure safety, two interceptors will parallel each side of a captured but overloaded vessel. Just as a bicycle rider will fall without enough forward speed, an overloaded boat can capsize for the same reason.



Agents skillfully operate within a vessel's confined space and inspect for hidden dangers as they secure the vessel.

Runners can ultimately be stopped using shotguns that shoot projectiles designed to disable engines. Before resorting to disabling fire as it's called, agents will first use other methods such as projecting authority and verbal commands. If those tactics are unsuccessful, they will fire warning shots toward the vessel.

Since disabling fire training isn't authorized in the field, the center offers plenty of opportunity. Live fire is done several miles at sea, in "blue water." Blue water defines the open ocean, where the shore is just a line on the horizon.

"You never know who's out there—murderers trying to escape, weapons traffickers, those with warrants," said Scott Leach, supervisory marine interdiction agent and the center's deputy director. "That's why we invest so heavily in our vessel commanders."

Wade recalled a boat trafficking Haitians from the Bahamas to Florida. That night, winds were brisk and waves topped seven feet as their vessel raced for the beach, now just 50 yards away. When the smugglers realized the breaking surf prevented them from reaching the shore, they ordered the Haitians to swim the rest of the way. Many couldn't. The next morning, bodies were found along West Palm Beach. "Smugglers have no regard for life," Wade said.