

BOAT CREW BASICS

A GUIDE FOR BOAT CREW CANDIDATES & MENTORS

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“Participate in a Man Overboard Evolution as a Pointer”

Some of the tasks we examine in the Boat Crew Program have counterparts in regular, civilian boating. Mooring up to a dock, basic first-aid tasks, tying various knots and hitches and determining the depth of water are all skills which the average boater has at least some experience with. But “participate as a man overboard pointer” is unfamiliar to most boaters; so we need to understand all that is involved.

Like many Boat Crew tasks, the conditions under which this task is performed (whether in training or actual scenarios) greatly influence how easy or difficult it is to perform, or even why it is done.

The idea of standing up tall, shouting “Man Overboard” and then doggedly pointing at the overboard victim is foreign to many. Okay, shouting “Man Overboard” intuitively makes sense, especially if you’re the only one who saw the fall. But what’s with this concept of pointing at the victim? Can’t the helmsman just see the victim? Well, actually NO, not all the time!

The reasons are many, but chief among them are the victim’s being hidden in the troughs and hard to see if not wearing an International Orange float-coat or life-jacket. And that can happen within a few yards of the boat, in heavy seas; and the situation will get worse as you travel further away from the victim.

The task requirements call for the “pointer” to loudly proclaim “Man Overboard, Port (or Starboard) Side” and then to shift to a position where the MOB victim can be continuously sighted. Unfortunately, the first part of that task, indicating which side the victim fell from, is of minimal value aboard boats the size that we operate. In practice, the Pointer will rarely be able to yell “Man Over . . .” before the boat has passed the victim. The theory is that the helmsman should turn briefly toward the side the victim fell from, in order

to swing the boat’s stern away from the victim. In practice, that almost never happens. Even at a leisurely 8-10 knots, the stern of a 24-footer will pass the victim before the Pointer can yell much after “Man . . .”. But it’s good to know the full procedure, in case you witness a MOB on a 100-footer. In that case, the helmsman might actually have enough time to swing the boat’s stern away from the victim.

After yelling out the MOB alarm, and first beginning to point at the victim, try to determine if you will be able to continuously observe the victim from your present vantage point. If not, relocate to a spot with greater height or less restricted visibility, but one that provides a nearby handhold for security. This might involve going up to the flyingbridge (if so equipped), or moving to the aft deck if inside the cabin.

Maintain pointing and verbal contact with the helmsman, so you can continuously provide him/her with relative bearings to the MOB victim. Use whatever relative bearing system works best for you. This may be the horizontal “clock” system, or formal relative bearings or use references to various parts of the boat (“off the port quarter”, etc.) Discontinue feeding the helmsman bearing and distance cues only after he/she directs you to because they have the victim reliably in sight.

If short-handed, you may need to reposition yourself to assist with MOB recovery. But don’t fight to jump into the middle of the fray, unless you’re needed. It may be better to position yourself on the opposite side of the deck, to counter-balance the weight of the victim and crew attending to him/her.

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