

THE COXSWAIN SHACK

SURFACE OPS PATROL TIPS & TRICKS

By: Bob Peterson, Coxn / QE / Air Crew, ADSO-OPT, D11 NR August, 2008

“What to Do While on Patrol”

Last month, we wrapped up a review of “Boat Crew Basics” that new and trainee Coxswains and Crew need to master. This month we kick off a new series of articles on Boat Patrol Ops, aimed at new patrol crews and old-timers alike. The days of merely showing up on patrol and waiting for cases to develop on their own are long gone. The presence of commercial salvagers (who charge big bucks for their services), the price of fuel and an overall downturn in the economy have all taken their toll on the number of people boating today.

As a result, we can no longer feel confident that we will “get a case” and be able to practice our techniques there. And some will point out that practicing SAR work on live cases is not the way to go. Look for other Aux boats on patrol to do training with. Check with the local CG Station and local LE assets to learn if they would like to conduct towing drills with you. And while we’re on the topic of working with the active duty folks, there are several distinct advantages to visiting them, familiarizing yourself with their procedures and policies, and discussing your boat’s and crew’s capabilities.

The fact remains that SAR controllers, Station watchstanders and OinC’s are more likely to refer cases to those Aux boats and crews they’ve worked with and know, than those they’ve never met! This is a double-edged sword, of course. If you do a poor job in training tows with them, they may be less inclined to send cases your way. So make sure you have your “A-team” crew with you when visiting your local station and doing training with them.

It’s always a good idea to “be on the watch” for unusual developments while on patrol. DSO-OP Gail Ramsey reminds all Coxswains and Crew that maintaining constant visual surveillance around you is a good way to uncover a case. After a few years of patrolling a given area, you’ll become aware of where commercial and recreational traffic tends to gather. You’ll know when and where to expect to see certain activities along wharfs and at piers and

when you see someone new tied up there, it’s a good idea to investigate. But before blundering into the situation, contact your Station, advise them of what you’ve seen, and indicate your intentions. They may know about the vessel in question and wave you off. Or they may wish you to approach cautiously until you can determine the boat’s name and activities. They can contact responsible parties ashore and determine what the boat is doing.

It goes without saying, but I’m going to say it anyway, conserving fuel is always a top priority. Racing around at speed, without being assigned a SAR case or otherwise directed by your Station to “MaxPro” somewhere, makes no sense, and sends the wrong message to the boating public. Low and slow is the rule of the day, and shutting down and tying up once on-scene makes a lot of sense.

Stop by the local marinas and establish contact. You may learn about future events being planned or changes in operations they may make. Advance info about fuel dock closings or anticipated future events is always helpful. Whether you’re an Aids Verifier or not, it’s always helpful to check out the local ATON’s, to note any discrepancies. Look for opened battery cases, damaged components or other signs of vandalism. Note the lighting and signage around all bridges. Report any damage or other sightings to the local Station or Sector San Francisco.

If you haven’t already done so, establish contact with your local PCA (Auxiliary Patrol Area Coordinator). These are the folks who are asked to round up crews to conduct patrols for all the races and other special events the CG supervises. You’ll get advance warnings about marine events and other activities planned for your area, in time to round up crewmembers and make plans to participate.

Copyright © 2008, R. M. Peterson, USCGAUX

The opinions expressed are the author’s. Reproduction in Coast Guard and Auxiliary publications is permitted and encouraged. Questions/Suggestions: bob@peterson.org