

THE COXSWAIN SHACK

SURFACE OPS PATROL TIPS & TRICKS

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The Road to Coxswain, Part 2

Last month, we started down the path to the Auxiliary Coxswain rating, by stressing the importance of finding a good mentor, becoming an accomplished Crewman and picking out a good facility. This month we continue down the path by choosing a patrol area and becoming thoroughly familiar with it.

In many areas of the country, where all or most flotilla members live near each other and patrol the local chunk of the coastline, choosing a patrol area involves minimal effort. But in D11NR, the choice is not that straightforward. You may live in the Bay Area but choose to boat in the Delta. Or you might live up the coast but prefer to boat on Inland Lakes. We truly have an immense and diverse region from which to choose a favorite patrol area. And, particularly if you have a trailered boat you may choose to patrol in multiple areas.

But let me suggest a different strategy, at least during your early patrol career. It's far easier to become adept at patrolling one area well than to do the same in multiple areas. Once you've mastered one area, you might consider moving on to others.

Area Familiarization – Your goal is to become intimately familiar with the entire patrol area: Where recreational boaters tend to congregate, where most of the cases seem to develop, where local police boats tend to patrol, what sort of marine events tend to generate problems, etc. Why do these tactics work? Well, despite all our PE and VE efforts, statistics tell us that novice boaters tend to get into trouble more often than the more experienced. Many will have smaller craft, often trailered I/O's and outboards, which often require assistance. **Hint:** *I vividly recall one productive Coxswain who routinely hung around a popular*

East Bay launch ramp, and had dozens of cases! The novice boaters who launched there would leave fuel valves closed, wander into the shallows, and become beset by other problems. Here's another example: *A wily Coxn who operated in the Redwood Creek area performed over 100 "ungroundings" by lifting grounded boats off the mud with his wake!*

I mentioned learning about the other "patrol assets" that frequent the area; in some situations, they can assist you, in others they may constitute your competition. Remember too that this factor changes dramatically over time. Years ago, when I first began my patrol career in the South Bay, the harbormasters at San Leandro, Redwood City, Coyote Point, and Oyster Point all operated patrol boats and often handled the majority of cases near their marinas. Today, none of them do!

I talked about paying attention to scheduled Marine Events in your patrol area. Years ago, when wind-surfing was in its infancy, early race organizers sought to establish their expertise over the newbie's streaming into their sport by scheduling "around Alcatraz" races on days with maximum ebb currents and high predicted winds. Half their entire fleet was in the water, exhausted and drifting out the Golden Gate! Today, most windsurfers have more accurately gauged their skills and strengths; however their stance these days seems to be that they continue racing until something breaks, either their equipment or their bones. Their races are nearly guaranteed to produce SAR cases!

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