

THE COXSWAIN SHACK

SURFACE OPS PATROL TIPS & TRICKS

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Mastering the Essentials, Pt. 1

So far we've stressed getting hooked up with a good mentor, finding a workable boat and logging plenty of Crew hours. We've also talked about picking an appropriate patrol area and learning its in's and out's. We've even talked about developing a patrol philosophy to help avoid the image of being an ambulance-chaser.

This month we jump right into it, with a skill that every Coxswain has to master: The Alongside Tow. Whether you find developing these skills helps you more in real-world SAR work, or in tri-annual on-the-water Requal sessions, you must understand all that's required.

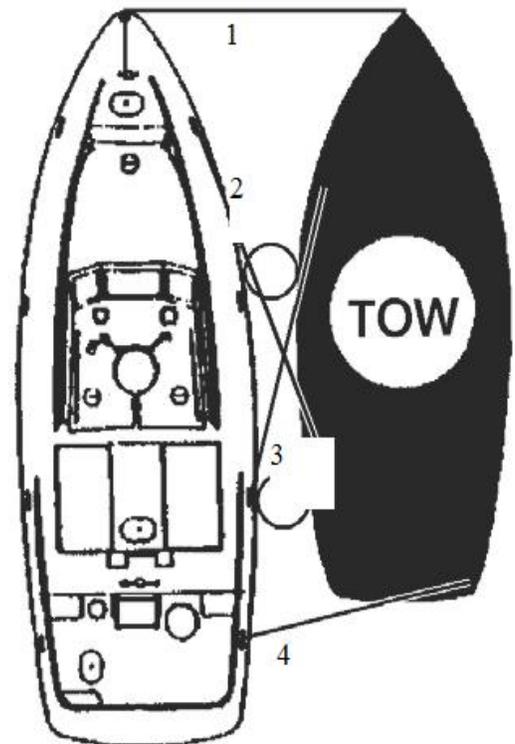
Many Coxswains like to transition from a Stern Tow to an Alongside Tow, without releasing the towline, ensuring that the disabled boat doesn't drift away. But that is not required, nor is it always preferred. Remember that using the towline as your bow-line may leave a lot of line on deck, in the crews' way; and if the towed boat required the use of a bridle, it may be preferable to release the towline, remove the bridle and reattach the bow-line.

The objective of an alongside tow is to permit two vessels to be maneuvered as one. This is used when approaching a dock, mooring or anchorage or when maneuvering in congested or restricted waters. But remember that it can only be safely done in protected or calm waters, whether in real-world SAR work, training or sign-offs. Here's a list of preliminary steps:

1. Determine on which side the tow will be placed, considering visibility and maneuvers
2. Note the effect of wind, weather, sea conditions and mating hulls, use to advantage;
3. Note the other vessel's drift rate and speed to select the best approach angle and speed;
4. Direct the crew to ready all lines and place fenders at gunwale height where hulls meet;
5. Plan to approach to position your props and rudders well aft of the disabled boat;
6. Brief both crews on intended placement of lines and fenders, have walking fenders out;
7. Always pass the eyes of alongside lines to the towed vessel, for easy attachment.

The balance of this article deals with the sequence in which the lines are placed. For reference, use COMDTINST M16554.5C, the Boat Crew Seamanship Manual, Chapter 17, Section D-48. There are many different theories on this and policies have changed over time. So we will exactly follow the methods cited in the Boat Crew Seamanship Manual.

This diagram below, taken directly from the BCSM, shows the preferred sequence of line application in rough seas and when time is critical. It sets the bow-line first, then the towing strap, then the backing line and lastly the stern line. This is the more typical sequence of line application in use today, by line numbers.



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