



# Whittier Soundings

Whittier Flotilla 02-04, District 17, Alaska



May 2005 Brad Wells FC, Sig Murphy VFC, Cathey Sterling FSO-PB Volume XV Issue 5

## National Safe Boating Week Vessel Safety Checks

by Cathey Sterling

Whittier Flotilla kicked off National Safe Boating Week with a weekend long Vessel Safety Check station at the Whittier Harbor.

Under the guidance of our FSO – VE Russ Lyday several qualified VE and qualifying VE gathered at Auxiliary Station Whittier. With banners in place on the station, wearing their orange Auxiliary float coats, and clip board in hand the boating public knew exactly where they could request a Vessel Safety Check.



After a 9:00am meeting the examiners split up, with groups taking station at each of two launch ramps, a group at the station and a group checking with vessel owners in the slips. After a lunch break the VE's continued giving courtesy inspections.

The only concession these dedicated vessel examiners made to the rainy weather was donning rain gear.

Saturday evening an informal potluck was held on the station deck. Everyone attending chipped in

a dish or two... and took the time to relax as well as discussing how the day went.



The vessel exam sheets were turned in to Russ and the tally for the day – 36 vessel safety checks completed.

Sunday the VE's met at 9:00am at the station to begin another day promoting boating safety through the vessel safety checks. Another 24 vessel safety checks were completed on Sunday bringing the weekend total to 66 vessels examined.

Ten people participated in the weekend VE's and two became qualified at that time.

Thank you for a job well done and Congratulations to the two newly qualified VE's.

All photos courtesy of Sig & Mary Murphy



## Vessel Examiners

Congratulations to our new vessel examiners: Bob Renke, Tom Kane, Lou and Charlotte Jones, Rae De Ley, Bill Holzheimer. David Couch has passed the written exam and is beginning his five supervised VE's. Several other Whittier flotilla members are working on the test.

Now we have "more than enough examiners". Right? **WRONG!!!**

According to the harbormaster of Whittier Harbor there are 17,000 registered boats in Anchorage! If we had 100 VE's it still would not be "enough"!

During ramp days in Whittier we had 9 examiners each day giving various amounts of time. We began about 9:30 each morning and focused on trailered boats. The 2 ramps in Whittier were full most of the day with about 8 boats each. Boats cannot leave the dock until the trailer is parked or retrieved. People were willing (and some enthusiastic) to have their vessels checked during this time. In two days we did 66 exams (on the ramps and in the harbor), but we didn't put a dent in the population. There are many more left to examine!

Anyone thinking about becoming a Vessel Examiner is encouraged to do so. The test is open book. The manual is available on-line and can be accessed during the test (the search feature is very helpful). If you have any questions please contact Russ Lyday or any of the current VE's.

We are a "one brick" flotilla. If you need (or want) to add "your brick", this is a relatively easy way to do it and you can make a great contribution with 10-20 hours a year!

## 2005 Prince William Sound Beach Cleanup

*By Chris Pallister*

Break out the Spaghetti-Western music and mournful whistling. We are about to review The Good, The Bad and The Ugly, otherwise known as the PWSkeeper/Whittier Coast Guard Auxiliary 4<sup>th</sup> Annual 2005 Beach Cleanup. Starting in reverse order, because I know you like to hear the worst news first, we'll review the Ugly - as in two broken bones, surgery, a couple of plates and nine screws Ugly.

One of our most dependable volunteers, Ben Greene, slipped on a log, fell and broke both bones above his wrist. Fortunately, it was not a compound break, but the arm was severely displaced. Ben suffered immensely, but stoically. The accident occurred in an isolated bight at the far western reach of the first large cove on your starboard as you cruise south from the southeast end of Lower Passage down the eastern coast of Knight Island. Ya'll know where I'm talking about, right? For those that can't read written directions, to be more specific Ben's arm snapped at 60°28.5'N; 147°41.2'W. I just love GPSs, because those GPS coordinates transmitted by Gerry Sanger to me, allowed us to find the crew that Gerry left on the beach while he hustled to Whittier with Ben, his wife, and the other 7 cleanup volunteers that sailed out with on *Sound Access*. Ben had surgery several days later and now will fry every security detector he enters with all the aforementioned hardware in his arm.

All kidding aside, Ben's accident was extremely unfortunate, frightening and very sobering. This



incident taught some valuable lessons. For several reasons, we were caught short this year without an adequate number of support vessels and crews for the large number of cleanup volunteers. We had 4 vessels with a total of 43 people including boat crews in the field. Pete Heddell ferried out 20 overnight volunteers and I five. Gerry Sanger carried 7 day volunteers and Dave Goldstein 4. The four vessels also carried 7 crew. Pete left his

load of volunteers at the campsite toward the southeast end of Ingot Island on Upper Passage.



Photo by LCDR Michael Felkay

From there, the cleanup crews dispersed to the shores of Eleanor, Ingot, Sphinx, Entry, and northeast Knight Islands. Pete Heddell unloaded his large complement of overnight volunteers and headed back to Whittier. We planned to shuttle the volunteers along the beaches with Gerry's beachable aluminum vessel, *Sound Access*, and with the aid of my crew's Zodiacs. However, when Ben was injured, Gerry had to hustle back to town. Dave Goldstein, in the *Chinook*, disappeared into a radio hole later that day and we lost radio communication with him.

Consequently, Saturday afternoon Dave also returned with his crew to Whittier as planned, but without me being able to fully discuss the circumstances with him. That left me in the field overnight with 24 people and *Opus*, my 24-foot yacht, (including the 2-foot" swimstep). One person per LOA foot just don't cut it! As Coastie Captain Michael Felkay said, "Do you have enough PFDs for everybody and aren't we just a wee bit overloaded?"

**Lesson One.** It is nearly impossible to have too many crewed support vessels in the field for the cleanup. There should be at least one vessel for every 6 or so volunteers working the beaches. Because cleanup activity is inherently dangerous, vessels with good communication and beach

capabilities must support cleanup crews. Unfortunately, Ben's accident occurred in a radio hole. His crew radioed but could not raise anybody. A large vessel, the 100-foot *Wild Horses*, sailed past the mouth of the cove they were in, but not only did it not respond to the radio hail requesting assistance, it did not see the two flares the cleanup crew fired off. Gerry Sanger later motored past the cove mouth while

transporting another cleanup squad. Gerry also did not hear the radio pleas for assistance and did not see another distress flare fired by Ben's compatriots.

**Lesson Two.** FSR radios are fine for beach communication, but every cleanup crew should have, and use, a VHF radio to communicate with support vessels. There is no guarantee that a handheld VHF would work, but it should suffice if there is a nearby support vessel. Only when Gerry came back to move Ben's crew to another site did he discover that Ben had been injured. Poor Ben suffered on the beach for over two hours before anybody outside his crew knew he was injured. With a more serious injury, that delay could prove fatal.

**Lesson Three.** A qualified medical person should accompany the cleanup in the field. It is just too far back for medical help and communication is too uncertain. A vessel such as the Safeboat would also provide another level of safety.

Are you ready for the Bad news? As in Bad weather. Saturday started off rather snotty. While driving up a very windy, cold and rainy Turnagin Arm at 0530, a fella tended to wonder if he was nuts contemplating a weekend of picking up garbage in the rain.



Photo by Chris Pallister



Whittier wasn't much better and if one volunteer would have said, "Let's go home," I'd have volunteered to drive. But these cleanup volunteers are fanatics, so no such luck. Pete Heddell was amazed so many showed up despite the weather. I think he wanted to stay home too. John and Sue Whitney suffered electrical bugs in the *Doc Walloper* and wisely decided they would not risk going out and possibly suffer boat problems in marginal weather. But I had a good hunch that the weather was going to get better later in the morning, becoming quite nice through the late evening, blow up for a while Sunday AM, and then get nice again. That is exactly how it played out. How did I know? NOAA said so.

I looked like a genius - or an idiot depending on perspective - when I told all the campers lounging on the beach in the balmy weather Saturday evening that it would start raining around 0200 Sunday, and it did right on cue. I felt pretty clever until the wind started to blow around 0530 and continued to build. Around 0730 it was howling pretty good, driving surf high into the air over the beach just outside the cove we anchored in. I'd anchored in about 18 feet of water as far back in the cove as I could get with my bow pointing out because I expected wind Sunday morning. What I didn't expect was for Williwaw winds to swirl into the cove and pound against my port side. Not wanting to weathervane in such a small area, we tied a stern line to a tree on shore. Naturally, with the boat unable to weathervane, the entire side of the vessel took the brunt of the wind. Doug Leiser and I cautiously checked the lines, determined the anchor was holding, and returned to the cockpit. Within just seconds, Nick Leiser then stepped to the back of the cockpit and zipped up the curtain intending to climb out onto the swimstep. He excitedly exclaimed that we were heading for shore. A quick look out the cabin window verified his assessment. Realizing that we would be onshore long before I could get my cold-blooded and prone-to-stall-until-warmed-up engine started, I began to raise the outdrive, simultaneously yelling for Doug and Nick to get in the Zodiacs. My intent here was for them to fire up the outboards and use the Zodiacs to keep *Opus* off

the beach. They thought I wanted the inflatables disconnected from the swimstep so that the Zodiacs would not act as wind sails to hasten *Opus'* imminent date with the beach. They shoved the inflatables off to the now nearby shore.

It was unbelievable how fast we sailed toward the beach. I assumed the anchor line had parted, because not more than 30 seconds elapsed from

the time we had checked the lines until we were right up to the beach. I was surprised when magically we seemed to stop without appearing to have hit the beach. Looking out the window to see what had stopped us, I was astounded to see Nick standing in the water past his waist holding us offshore. I had instant nightmarish visions of a wave or gust of wind overpowering him, causing him to fall and become crushed beneath the boat. Seconds earlier, as we were heading for shore, I had yelled out the window to my son Ryan camping on the beach to come help. Unknown to me, and out of sight by the transom, he had run over and dove in with Nick to help keep us off the shore. I grabbed my boat pole and used it to fend off while telling Nick and Doug to get the Zodiacs and use them to push us offshore. While all this was going on, the Coast Guard crew camping on shore came running and started hauling on my stern line, which kept me from swinging into a big pile of jagged rocks. (Now I know the embarrassment Dave Brubaker must have experienced when the Coast Guard got to watch him in action. I promise I'll never tease him again about running over Brubaker's Bump - at least not in print). With *Opus* momentarily rescued from an impending collision, I scrambled to the bow and, not wanting it to become fouled in my prop, started to pull up my anchor line, expecting it to be broken. I was surprised and relieved when the anchor came up with about a bushel basket of slimy kelp balled around it and a large rock wedged in it. A 22-pound Danforth is significantly more anchor than *Opus* requires, but here size didn't matter. Once I got the anchor cleared, and Nick and Doug had barged me off the beach, I fired up the engine and slowly motored out through the rocks, dinging my prop once on the way. That is the first brush with the bottom *Opus*



has suffered in 21 years. Nick and Doug also dinged both Zodiac props while fighting *Opus* off the beach and into the wind.

**Lesson Four.** When things are going haywire, clear communication becomes ever more important. If I had clearly communicated to Doug and Nick that I wanted them to use the Zodiacs to keep *Opus* off the beach, much of the ensuing

snafu and embarrassment could have been avoided. Taking a second to make sure everybody knows what is expected of them is vitally important in critical situations.

**Lesson Five.** While you may have plenty of scope out for the depth of water you are anchored in, your anchor may not be deep enough to get below the kelp or eelgrass depth. If not, your anchor is likely to get fouled in the bottom growth.

Once it is wrapped in kelp, it might as well have a ball of grease around it. Danforths tend to foul easily and they are susceptible to picking up rocks that jam the hinge mechanism. Both of those things happened in this case and the anchor couldn't possibly reset. The solution is to make sure your anchor is in at least 40-50 feet of water, which in most cases, but not all, will get you below the kelp and eelgrass. We had set out well over 150 feet of line in about 18 feet of water, which is normally way more than enough scope. But in reality, we needed about 250 feet to make sure the anchor was deep enough to avoid the vegetation.

**Lesson Six.** When you are secured fore and aft, a broadside wind will put immense strain on your anchor. When that happens, don't rely on a single forward anchor, but set another out in the direction of the prevailing wind and loosen your stern line so that the vessel can come about into the wind, thereby relieving much of the strain. Don't be lazy; get it done sooner than later.

**Lesson Seven.** Get rid of the Danforth and replace it with a CQR.

And no, I don't want the Golden Anchor award!

Finally! The Good news. Other than for just a few wet and windy hours, we experienced very nice weather and calm seas. We also picked up a huge pile of garbage. Can't say *a boatload*, because we gathered much more than that. The

beach crews gathered more than two hundred bags of garbage.



Photo by LCDR Michael Felkay

Probably an equivalent amount of large plastic debris such as fishing nets, lines, buckets, 5-gallon jugs and large chunks of Styrofoam was also stacked in piles.



Photo by Chris Pallister

We found a fiberglass boat crushed to smithereens, with various components scattered about including a late model 3D depth finder, a dual-prop Volvo outdrive and sturdy aluminum window frames.



Photo by Chris Pallister

And Sig, there were floats and buoys all over the place. Sorry you couldn't join us. Unfortunately, the Forest Service was unable to haul the garbage back to Whittier because their vessel the *Williwaw* suffered mechanical problems. There is now a significant task of coordinating the retrieval of all the collected garbage, but with the assistance of



the Forest Service, PWSkeeper, the Whittier Flotilla and the charter fleet, it will get done.

Each succeeding year, the Cleanup becomes larger and more garbage is collected. But, it is now getting to the point that we need to review the activity and determine how best to proceed. As we get further from Whittier, the beaches become more fouled and the logistics ever more difficult. If you query the volunteers about the Cleanup, they all vociferously support the effort. However, safety and logistics become ever more of a factor as the program grows and expands to remote beaches. Furthermore, there must be a limit to how much plastic debris we can haul home and that landfills will accept. However, some crude calculations indicate that there is an unrecognized oil spill in the form of refined plastics on PWS beaches that is far greater in both volume and weight than the spill created by the Exxon Valdez. If the general public realized that, maybe more assistance to attack the problem would be forthcoming.

Recent studies indicate that there are some very serious ecological concerns related to plastic debris in the coastal environment. Beyond the widely recognized problems that animals have with plastic entanglement, and the aesthetic issues of visual blight, there are more serious issues related to beached plastics. Scientist only recently discovered that once plastic degrades into small enough particles, marine plants and animals ingest it. Plastics are loaded with all kinds of nasty chemicals and it appears that the process of coastal degradation of plastics is contributing all sorts of potent toxins to the coastal environment. This appears to be an issue that will become ever more important and may require a professional response to address it.

We want to thank all those who again helped with the Cleanup. Doug and Nick Leiser, Rae De Ley, Chris Pallister, Dave Goldstein, Van Waggoner, and John and Sue Whitney represented the Whittier Flotilla. The Whittier charter fleet sent out Dave Goldstein, Gerry Sanger and Pete Heddell. We own them all a huge thanks. The City of Whittier again provided dumpsters that unfortunately did not get used. The Coast Guard

provided 8 active-duty members to help clean beaches. The Glacier Ranger District tried, but couldn't get the *Williwaw* on step and had to abandon their trash retrieval effort. They'll have plenty to do later. And last, but certainly not least, to all the tremendous volunteers that clambered over the treacherous beaches to gather garbage, we offer our sincere appreciation.

## Coxswain Academy

*By Linda Wells*

This year's Coxswain Academy was well organized, full of learning opportunities, and fun. Homer and Kachemak Bay had some of the best weather and scenery - perhaps unmatched anywhere in the state for this past week.

We all had the attitude of using this intense training as a tool for improving personal seamanship skills and understanding the role of Coxswain. Proper reporting skills were emphasized.



*OTO BMC Bob Gross instructing class*

With some of the new Patrol Order Management System (POMS) requirements, we practiced the latest call in procedures to Command Center and the local Marine Safety Office.

My experience included five days aboard the new Homer OPFAC, 275594, with her instructor on board, BM2 Kevin Smith and our Operations Training Officer, BMC Bob Gross.



# U.S. COAST GUARD AUXILIARY



*deck preparation on 275594*

My biggest lesson was to trust my qualified crew, leave the door open for questions and not over-communicate. That alone demonstrated the value of applying Team Coordination Training techniques.

The instructors, including some new faces, were well chosen for experience and ability to teach, and they were noticeably committed to providing the most up-to-date techniques in boat handling, towing, and rescue.

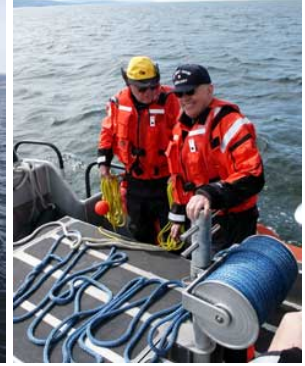


*Stewart Sterling instructing class*

This came in handy as some students participated in two real-life rescue evolutions that happened on two late afternoons. We thoroughly appreciated Craig and Gayle Forrest's sailboat, George and Francis Eischen's 50-foot fishing vessel, and Charlie Audino's 28-foot Bayliner, which were used in several afternoon practice tow exercises.



*Bill Morris conducting an alongside tow*



*Don Young & Sig Murphy preparing for tow*

All nine students showed enthusiasm in classroom lectures and underway opportunities.



*BM2 Kevin Smith instructing class*

They also fearlessly participated in the much anticipated Night Navigation which included nautical chart course plotting, some combination electronic and paper chart fixes underway, and some fender "man-overboard" drills in the deep darkness between 2200 and 0145.



*Night Navigation*

Coxswain Academy training comes highly recommended by me, who was hesitant at first to throw my hat in the ring. The instructors recognized my level of skills and took it several notches forward, teaching me more than I could



have learned in many books and many seasons on the water. I hope to use it well, especially when working with this season's Auxiliary SAFEboat crew trainees and fellow qualified crew and coxswain teams.



2005 Coxswain Academy Instructors



2005 Coxswain Academy Class



## Coxswain Academy, Check Ride, & Oral Boards

by Bill Morris

This was truly a team effort...mentoring, training, & patient repetition..."out of the hole, around the tree, back in the hole". It's a long list of folks who make this possible.

Last summer Linda & I went from the proud owners of a leaky Zodiac to UTM Crew qualified. Last month I was fortunate to be selected to the Coxswain Academy in Homer. This was 10 days of classroom & on-the-water training. The biggest mental hurdle for most of us was the night navigation exercise. Two students and an instructor running a course in the wee hours...nerves stretched, hitting a log, or

misplacing Homer..."See you in Guam". I had the added bonus of a Man Overboard drill during my turn at the helm. It was so unexpected that I forgot to react. I've promised Linda that I'd do better if she ever falls in the drink at night. I won't bore or fess up on what I did...the proper procedure is to stop, turn 180°, and follow the bubble trail back to the victim. Sure sounds simple now.

I wanted to do my Check Ride ASAP before I got too rusty. I was surprised that rust was forming after only 3 weeks time. This proved the importance of practice. The Seward boat had no plotter or GPS...we did have a radar & paper charts. Back to basics was a great experience. We used the radar to determine our position, RPM for our speed, Speed/Time/Distance wheel for running time...I benefited greatly by the GPS installer being a day late.

For one portion of our exercise, a throw ring with light attached was put overboard to serve as a "victim in the water" for later in the day. A notice was broadcast to other boaters asking them to please leave the ring alone. A good Samaritan

must have thought there was a different ring with light marked USCGAUX so they picked it up. We spent 3 hours running every search pattern known to man trying to locate the missing ring/victim. Our "Man Over Board" was apparently a pretty strong swimmer as he was waiting for us at the dock!

The oral boards following my check ride was an interesting blend of mental fatigue and "brain fade". We worked our way through the fog and I'm now a bonafide coxswain...still with no boat.

What did I learn...

- 1) You don't have to be a boater to become Crew or Coxswain qualified. You do need desire & lots of assistance...our flotilla is overflowing with folks able & willing to help. Just let them know.
- 2) The training received is something you couldn't put a price on.
- 3) It's much better to make mistakes & faux pas in a controlled training situation.



# U.S. COAST GUARD AUXILIARY

If the opportunity to attend the Coxswain Academy is ever offered...jump on it!!!



It is the beginning of boating season and we need to take a few moments and be sure we have everything needed for a safe and enjoyable summer on the water.

Have a Vessel Safety Check done to be sure you have the required equipment and everything is current. It gives you a chance to look over the vessel while another set of eyes is looking as well. Be sure all your equipment and gear is in good working and serviceable order. Make sure you know where your safety gear is stored and is easily accessible. Check the local notice to mariners and make sure your charts are up to date. Make sure you have a current tide table aboard. Check current weather conditions. File a float plan.

Be sure any visitors on your vessel know where the safety gear is located, how to wear a PFD, how to operate the VHF radio and how to operate the boat if needed.

When on the water, report any problems with Aids to Navigation, hazards to navigation or suspicious activities.

Have an enjoyable and safe summer on the water.



## Auxiliary PWC

This year we will again have the use of PWC courtesy of the Kawasaki loaner program and Team CC.



We have scheduled three training weekends for those wanting to become PWC Operator qualified.

May 28, 29, & 30 we will have PWC training during Operation Big Lake. June 18 & 19 training in Whittier and July 23 & 24 training in Seward. The boats will also be used to support the Challenge Alaska Summer Splash program July 9 & 10 operating as safety vessels for skiers.

All qualified PWC Operators are invited to attend any of the secessions or may schedule the boats for safety patrols to complete your operational hours for qualification.

For further information contact ADSO-OP PWC Cathey Sterling – [cathey@gci.net](mailto:cathey@gci.net)



**U.S. COAST GUARD AUXILIARY**

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**17th District**

<http://www.uscgaux.org/~170/>

<http://www.uscgaux.org/~1700204/>

**Whittier Flotilla Web Site**  
<http://www.uscgaux.org/~1700204/>