

Whittier Soundings



Newsletter of the Whittier Flotilla 170-02-04 District 17 Alaska

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The Ultimate Boat Ride

By Stewart Sterling

We were heading back to Ucluelet at maximum speed. It was Monday, the last day of being on the water for our Rigid Hull Inflatable Operational Training (RHIOT) class and we were out for a training cruise and to refuel the boats. Now the situation had changed, my training officer overheard a call on channel 16 on his portable for a PIW (Person in the Water). Tuning the boat's radio to the proper channel from the training and operating channel of 82A he monitored the situation, told me to turn about since I was at the helm, and increase RPMs to 3500. I reversed course and being the third boat in line we were now in the lead. I could hear him as he contacted the other boats. Leaning over from behind and shouting into my ear through my helmet so I could hear him over the wind and twin 150hp 2-stroke outboards on our Rigid Hull Inflatable (RHI), he pointed out a course to take using landmarks ahead and said to head that way at 4500rpm. We were in a group of islands with shallow water on almost all sides. After giving me course corrections several times by shouting in my ear and pointing, he informed me that it was confirmed as a SAR callout and said to "pin it".

The training from the last week of intensive instruction took over and paid off. We were in protected water from the islands all around us that was almost flat calm. Because of this I advanced the throttles to maximum going well past the 25% reserve and re-trimmed the boat to gain max speed. Glancing down at the instruments I noticed the

starboard engine was governed at 5400RPM but the port was only at 5200rpm. I tried advancing the port engine but it would not go past the stops. I concentrated on the situation ahead of us. My Training officer switched over to the standard hand signals for course corrections by tapping on one side or the other of my arms to change direction or quickly running his hand on the center of my back for straight ahead since I could no longer hear him from the wind of 40+ knots and the roar of the outboards. Guiding me through the islands and shallows we did many course corrections and several sharper turns which I trimmed down a little for and then back up to maintain max speed.

Coming out from the protection of the islands there was now only a reef between us and Japan. The swells increased but were kept in check by the reef. I instinctively kept the throttle to the stops since the swells were not too bad running almost parallel to them, only chopping throttle at the crests of the swells to keep the bow down as I went over them. We were getting closer now. The arm of my training officer appeared in my line of vision pointing at an aircraft. I vaguely heard him yell to me that it was the location to go to but to stay inshore of the buoy marking the end of the reef which we had gone by earlier in the day. The aircraft was bright red in color and circling over a spot ahead of us. Keeping track of the aircraft I rounded the buoy marking the end of the reef, passing it as close as I felt was safe to do so and headed into the swells. I reduced the throttles to keep about 25% in reserve working them (actually slamming them) on and off to control the bow

heading into the swells. Trying to time the wave frequency I remember losing it once and launching the boat off of a swell. I chopped the throttles in the air and pinned them just as we re-entered the water. It was not a soft landing. Slowing a bit because of the launching I worked the throttles as hard as I could to keep as much speed on as possible by letting off at the crests and hammering the throttles as soon as the bow started to drop.

Another RHI appeared just in front of us coming out from the Ucluelet harbor. My training officer yelled to follow them. We rounded Amphritrite Point and again turned parallel to the swells running just off shore. The aircraft was now circling around us and I received a downward tugging on my back signaling me to slow down. The other RHI turned toward the shore and I followed them in closer, approaching the rocky shoreline. We entered a narrow opening in the rocks into a small basin that was just big enough for several small boats. Pivoting the RHI around with the engines I kept station into the swells with the other student watching for waves coming in between the rocks as our training officer assessed the situation. There was nothing further that our boat could do so we headed back out through the rocks to guide the RCMP (Royal Canadian Mounted Police) boat in as it was on the way to the scene. The Canadian Coast Guard RHI from Bamfield arrived at that time and relieved us and we moved farther out from shore to meet back up with the other two RHIOT boats that were waiting a safe distance off shore. We did a quick debrief and my training officer paid me the ultimate complement by telling me “nice job driving”. The other two training boats headed off toward Bamfield and I called out “Secure” and getting my SAC response (Send-Acknowledge-Confirm) I advanced the throttles and turned the RHI to follow them.

The Canadian Coast Guard operates their RHIOT School (Rigid Hull Inflatable Operational Training) just for the type of situations that we found ourselves in on our last day in class. It is tailored to hone the skills of a boat driver, leader and lookout in the everyday patrols and the SAR cases that you might encounter as a member of the CCG or CCGA. The School has been in operation since 1984 and runs during the winter months, usually September to April. This time period is used as this

is when the weather is at its best, or worst, depending on your point of view. It calls the Bamfield Lifeboat Station home.



Bamfield is the oldest continually operating lifeboat station in North America I was proudly informed, and is located on Vancouver Island B.C. just up the Pacific coast from Victoria. It is also home to a 47’ Motor Life Boat (MLB) and a RHI on active duty for Search and Rescue (SAR). The school operates week on week off from Tuesday to following Tuesday. It is an 80 hour intensive, hands on experience that most would pay money for if they are looking for the ultimate boat ride. No where else have I ever been able to drive a boat “like I stole it”.



The trick they teach you is how to do it safely and stay in control of it by learning from and adapting to the conditions you are in. Only six students are in each class and with two training officers there is a lot of one-on-one teaching. The students are a selected mix of Canadian Coast Guard, Auxiliary and other government services along with local fire

departments, rescue crews, and a few select students from other countries.



Just the class before mine one of the instructors for the USCG MLB surf school had attended the school. The appointment to the school is earned, and sought after by many and a prerequisite to advancement for their active duty boat crews.

I started my trip from home (in Anchorage Alaska) getting on the plane in -5 degree weather. I transferred in Seattle and arrived in Victoria BC after seven hours of airports and airplanes. I was ready for some boats after that! I had to overnight in Victoria and the next morning I walked to the Coast Guard station to catch the bus to Bamfield. It was not a bus but the truck that the crew takes back and forth that was set up to even transport the boats if needed. I met the driver, who was actually one of the instructors and another student there and we took off on the way to the coast. But since Bamfield is in a more remote area it is accessed by back roads off the main highway. So after picking up two more students and the other instructor that lived on the way it was a five hour drive to Bamfield with the last 50 miles or so being dirt logging road. We arrived safe and in perfect weather that was at least 60 degrees warmer from the day before. To get to the lodge that was to be home for the next week and to get to the station you had to go across the small bay by boat.



Whittier Flotilla 170-02-04 District 17 Alaska

We arrived and set up and then toured the local area. Class started at 0800 the next morning and “plan for the short boat ride there” we were told.

First thing Wednesday morning after arriving was the official paperwork, the introductions of everyone, and then straight into the collision regulations test (NAV rules). I passed, but the help from all the group study of the night before made a big difference, especially with the small differences for the Canadian version. We then did boat checks to familiarize ourselves with the 733 RHI.



After that, all the gear was issued and it was classroom lessons on the PPE and emergency procedures. After lunch it was more PowerPoint's and then we got underway for some basic maneuvering which consisted of approaches, docking and a slalom course. Then we had to do the slalom course in reverse!

Thursday was more PowerPoint's and lectures first thing on communications, PIW, and capsizing. We then geared up in our drysuits and jumped in.



Whittier Soundings January 2007

We practiced re-boarding the boat and then working from the boat recovering each other by direct contact, with a line and by the parbuckle method.



After that the capsizing training was done by first flipping the retired training boat at the dock and then towing it to the middle in front of the station with a crew on the overturned hull and entering the water.



We were taught how to retrieve gear from inside the overturned boat by ducking under and coming up inside of it.



Then everyone moved away on an attached line and the capsizing reversal system was activated.



It was an awesome sight to see the boat re-right itself with the big inflating air bladder!



After lunch it was more classroom lessons on the radar, chart plotter, fueling, and all the mechanicals of the boat.

Friday started by getting very in-depth with wave theory, a lecture on heavy weather operation and on station keeping both off shore and against shore and all about pacing. After lunch we were underway doing everything presented in the morning. We started off with pacing the 47MLB, first starting at about 6-8 knots and continued on up to speeds of 18 knots.

We then headed out towards Cape Beal and into the weather for some heavy weather handling.



This was the first taste of the capabilities of the boat and I was very impressed. It's quite the experience when the instructor takes you for your first run in the swells and wave chop. It was almost a sensory overload to watch him at the helm and on the throttles, watch what was coming at us at 30 plus knots in waves much taller than me and to hang on! But I was hooked! Then we practiced station keeping by placing the nose of the boat just off a rock face sideways to the swells within throwing distance of the beach. That was quite the experience with the ocean swells moving you around with the particle motion. Back at the classroom we did some pilotage work and figured out routes to take from destinations given to us.

Saturday it was bright and early at the classroom with towing both stern and alongside discussed. Then we got underway. The 47MLB from the station was the vessel to be towed and the teams of students on the three boats took turns setting up and doing a stern tow and then transferring to a side tow.



Then we practiced docking the 47MLB to its dock while we had it in an alongside tow.

After towing we did some more runs in the waves near Cape Beal trying to get our timing right on the throttles in the larger seas. After lunch we went right back out for more practice doing throttle and trim control in the waves. After that we did timing runs to establish speeds at certain RPMs getting ready to do the dead reckoning night navigation run. We broke for dinner and went back to the station as it was getting dark. We were given the locations to go to and a time limit to be underway, and then split into two teams. Courses were plotted on the charts, notes made and we were off to the boats.

This night navigation was to be done solely by dead reckoning so no GPS, chart plotter or Radar were involved. We got underway and set throttles at 3000RPM and off we went into the darkness. Our route was split into three legs so that each team member had a turn navigating as leader, as driver and as lookout. The lookout had the benefit of night vision goggles, but depth of field or being at speed was not their strong point. Along the way we had to navigate a shallow rocky area and locate and enter a narrow opening to a small bay. At the same time we had to give a total ETA for our route and bets were made to see which team could be the closest to their estimate. Our team had some concerns with the entrance point to the shallow rocky area entrance point but we decided to error our ETA for safety and re-plot our entrance on the fly. The rest of the route went fairly smooth except when I was lookout going into the narrow passage to the small bay and I sighted what looked like a log with the night vision goggles. Anyone within earshot knew about the "Log dead ahead!" It turned out to be a line of foam in the water that looked just like a log. Better safe than minus a couple of out drives and props though! The rest of the route went like clockwork (which is just how it was!) and our turns and courses and leg times put us right back at the start point on the money. We were 16 minutes behind our ETA though and were shocked to find out the other team only missed theirs by one minute. Redemption came to us though as we found out they had mistakenly plotted their course in true and improvised the entire time by visual sightings to run their course.



If it had been raining or foggy they would have been up the creek. During the rest of the class, if they reached for an item, our team would jump in and say "here let me find that in magnetic for you!" All in good fun, it made the entire group closer.

Sunday morning was boat repair class and we learned how to do maintenance on the boat and repair the inflatable tubes. A search pattern lecture with PowerPoint was next and after lunch we were underway once again. We plotted courses with the electronics on board and ran the courses changing duties on each leg of the course. We then did search patterns. While doing search patterns a group of killer whales passed near us looking for tasty morsels. The instructors then moved to one boat and gave instructions to follow them and stay in their wake or risk going aground....the chase was on.



We kept them in sight and no damage was done but when we finally stopped they said to turn off the electronics. When this was done they asked where we were. After a few dirty looks the charts came out and landmarks were searched for. It took a bit but our boat gave a location between two islands first. They asked "are you sure?" and we dove back to the charts. After moving our boat about 50 feet to one side we found another distinguishing landmark and revised our location to the other side of the second island mentioned before and got the thumbs up. On the way back to Bamfield it was more trim and throttle work in the seas near Cape Beal. After dinner we reported back to the station for night navigation exercise number two. This time we would have GPS and radar and the chart plotter to guide us. But as we got the destination points, the distances were greatly increased and there were going to be many obstacles to navigate, plus we had about half the time to plot with on the charts.

We got busy on the chart work then dressed out in the dry suits, went to the boats and entered all the waypoints. Once again we headed off into the darkness. This time our team's run was almost flawless. I was lookout on the first leg, driver for the second and navigator for the third. The first leg included a shallow rocky area that we navigated without a hitch. The next leg, when I was at the helm, included entering a passage with an entrance just wide enough for the boat to squeeze through that I did not see the opening until we were almost entering it. I would not have found it if not for the navigator giving directions and course corrections to me. I then drove some distance into another bay with a winding entrance and islands all around.

My turn to navigate, which was next, was the return leg and was actually the longest. Turns, courses and fixes were going according to plan when I noticed I had lost my GPS fix. After fiddling with the controls for a bit I looked at the other consol that the instructor was sitting at that had the GPS and he grinned and held the cover down. "Dang" was the first thought, then I pulled my notes I had made from plotting before getting underway out, verified position with the radar, set a range distance for the next turns and used the EBL (Electronic Bearing Line) to verify when to turn. I didn't tell the driver what was up since I had the big picture and we ended up at the finish waypoint perfectly. At that point I found out that when I had been driving the last third of the middle leg we also had "an equipment failure" and never knew about it while doing the winding entrance to the bay with the islands all around. Our skill and confidence with using the electronics and also not relying on them and switching to dead reckoning made us feel a lot better with our navigation skills

Monday was another beautiful weather day and we dry suited up for the trip to Ucluelet to refuel the boats. We got underway and this time enjoyed the sights on the way across. Going through the Broken Group Islands I kept a lookout for picture taking opportunities. I was enjoying the ride so much that I forgot to take photos until we were entering Ucluelet Harbor. The boats were refueled and we headed back. We were almost two thirds of the way back when we heard the call.

My trip to RHIOT School has been one of the high points of my US Coast Guard Auxiliary

experience to date. Our District 17 has been running Coast Guard Non Standard boats since 2001 when western Prince William Sound received SAFEBoat 256611 to run out of Whittier, Alaska. I became crew to run that boat and was among the first crew to help augment the Coast guard presence in Valdez Alaska after 9-11. I qualified as PWO (personal watercraft operator) and as Coxswain after that and was then given 256611 as the leader in charge for two years. Gaining experience I began helping with the D17 Coxswain Academy, put on annually since the summer of 2000. The last three years I have been instructing in the Coxswain Academy program. The Canadian Coast Guard Auxiliary was used to help model the SAFEBoat program in Alaska and an exchange program was developed between our academy in District 17 and a Canadian Auxiliary position at the RHIOT School. In our 2006 Coxswain Academy we had our first student from Canada, and for 2007 we have another Auxiliarist from Canada attending as I write this. This exchange program will help open up new ideas for training to each partner as well as make the distance closer between the two organizations, both with a common goal.



I have been in the Auxiliary since August of 2000. It was my wife that actually decided to join and I joined because I wasn't going to let her do something that sounded that interesting without me. My first OTO (Operations Training Officer) once asked me why I had joined the Auxiliary. I couldn't really give a good answer just that it seemed "the right thing to do" I have not regretted the decision to join the Auxiliary since then, especially with the opportunities that have been presented to me and the experiences I've had both with the people I meet and the people that I have helped.

I definitely know it was the right thing to do.
Photos courtesy of Stewart Sterling & Grant Legge

Operations

By Rae De Ley

Dear Members- I am working with Tom Kane, FSO-OPS to coordinate our on the water training this summer. If you are interested in getting out on the SAFEBoat for Training, drop me an email, call me at home, or catch me at the next Aux meeting. Let me know what date you are interested in. I will let you know if the SAFEBoat is going out that day, if there is room for a Trainee, and I will get you connected with the proper Coxswain for details.

As some of you know, the schedule for SAFEBoat Coxswains has already been set. Many Coxswains have duty for three days in a row (Friday, Saturday and Sunday). The plan is that Tom will coordinate the NSB Crew for the SAFEBoat, and I will coordinate the Trainees. It looks like we will have a busy summer.

The schedule is for the SAFEBoat to go out for a few hours for an evening Patrol on Friday night, and then during the day on Saturday and Sunday. Rather than having three or four Trainees show up in Whittier on a given day, we want to get organized. It is a long way to drive to spend the day standing on the dock and I know you are itching to get some on water training time.

I have spoken to some of you already about your desires for Training this summer. As you know we will not be having a Crew Academy this summer. So get out your date books, do a little long range planning, and drop me an email. I'll let you know if training on the SAFEBoat on that day is already spoken for or not.

Also, if you are interested in on water training on the SAFEBoat and we have not already spoken, please contact me. I have already submitted a list to Tom with the names of the members working toward Crew, UTM Crew, PWC Operator, and Coxswain. I want all of you to have access to the member training opportunities as they arise.



TCT

By Tom Kane

Just to follow up, have all crew and coxswain taken the one hour TCT refresher for 2007?

You should have taken either:

- 1) The eight hour course if your five years were up since the last 8 hour course or
- 2) A one hour refresher if you were current on the eight hour course. If you have not taken the refresher then you will not be allowed to go out as crew or coxswain on orders. If you need to take the one hour TCT, please contact me to arrange a time when you will be able to take the refresher. I will arrange a time with you after I get any more responses.

ICS

By Cathey Sterling

The Incident Command System (ICS) was developed from the California Department of Forestry's need to maintain better control of resources during wildfires. It was adopted by the US Coast Guard to better manage resources and assets during emergencies. ICS is a working protocol for managing personnel, equipment and other resources during an event. ICS provides a flexible and manageable guideline to meet the needs of a variety of agencies and events, from planned events to natural disaster such as earthquakes and hurricanes, to manmade disasters like the Exxon Valdez.

Most may remember the grounding of the M/V Selendang Ayu off Unalaska Island December 2004. It was a chance for ICS 300 qualified members to provide assistance to the US Coast Guard during the initial days of the event.

Participating in ICS during Northern Edge will give our members a chance to put into practice the skills and knowledge learned in ICS 300 class. Our participation will give us a greater understanding of the ICS training and prepare us for the possibility of using these skills during an actual event.

It is an honor to be asked to participate during this important training and a chance to provide the Coast Guard with the support and experience the Auxiliary has to offer.

Fellowship

By Deanna Barbarick

The spring 2007 Flotilla Fellowship was again a rousing success. Thanks to Jean and Bill Holzheimer for hosting this potluck event on Saturday April 14.



We had about 42 guests in attendance and another wonderful variety of dishes and beverages brought by our members.



These get-togethers provide some time for all of us to enjoy, apart from the important work we accomplish as auxiliaries. Our next event on the calendar will be the caboose cookout May 19 on the day of the Whittier Harbor clean-up and VE weekend. We'll be providing the hotdogs and "fixings," and all who would like are encouraged to bring a favorite dish.

VE DAY in Whittier

By Russ Lyday

Everyone should mark Saturday, May 19th on the calendar!

This is the big "Kick-Off" for our summer activities in Whittier and all members can participate. Please join us for these events.

Harbor Cleanup, Vessel Safety Checks
Caboose Cookout, Flare Training

Harbor Cleanup will start at 9am and take about an hour. Vessel Safety Checks may begin earlier, depending on the tides and the number of boats coming to the boat ramps for launching. The cookout will start at noon and flare training will be conducted later in the day.

All members can participate in all the events, including our Vessel Safety Check Project. If you are not a vessel examiner, you can assist by talking to boaters at the boat ramps or in the harbor and encouraging them to have a Vessel Safety check, then coordinating with the vessel examiners.

Our VE Day is timed to start with National Safe Boating Week. National Safe Boating Week is a campaign sponsored by the National Safe Boating Council. This year the message is education of the boating public on life jacket wear.



National Safe Boating Week
May 19-25, 2007

Once in a Lifetime Experiences

By Russ Lyday

I hope all of you had a chance to read Stewart Sterling's article in this edition of Whittier Soundings. For Stewart this was clearly one of those "Once in-a-Lifetime Experiences".

Congratulations and "Well Done" to Stewart for attending this training in Bamfield. Stewart has learned some very valuable new skills which he will undoubtedly pass on to other coxswains in Whittier Flotilla and the rest of D17. We will all receive benefit from his training.

The Auxiliary offers many opportunities for members to have Once-In-A-Lifetime experiences. Sylvia Condy attended recruiting training at the Coast Guard Academy. Mark Parmelee went to Instructor Training in Petaluma. In May, Tom Kane will attend training in Kodiak for web design and PowerPoint presentation development. Many of us have attended the 10 day Coxswain Academy. The list goes on. Opportunities abound in many areas to receive valuable training and to work with active duty Coast Guard, as well as other Auxiliarists from around the nation.

As we strive to fill our role in promoting boating safety and supporting the Coast Guard, our lives can be greatly enriched and others lives can be saved.



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Member Info

AUXDATA and AUXINFO PowerPoint Slides Available

Do you have trouble navigating AUXDATA and AUXINFO? A new PowerPoint presentation, created by the Department of Information Technology, is now available on the [Member Training page](#) of the [National Training Department](#). Scroll down the page and look under "Value-added Training". This document is an excellent resource for every member. [Posted: 19 APR 2007. Source: DC-T and DC-I] *this article reprinted from the US Coast Guard Auxiliary National Web Site.*