

Summer 2026

Volume 123, Issue 2

United States Coast Guard Auxiliary

Official Newsletter of Coast Guard Auxiliary East District-Northern Region



topside



Inside this issue:

Leadership

<i>Table of Contents</i>	2
<i>District Leadership</i>	2
<i>Messages from EXCOM and DIRAUX</i>	3-6
<i>Help Needed</i>	7-8
<i>Division Information</i>	9-18
<i>Directorate Information</i>	19-27
<i>Information from Around the District</i>	28-48
<i>History</i>	49-54
<i>Obscura</i>	55-56
<i>Photographs</i>	57-65
<i>Message from the Editor</i>	66
<i>Contact Information</i>	66
<i>Parting Shot</i>	67

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District Chief Of Staff (DCOS) Michael B. McElwee	
District Captain Central (DCAPT-C) Jeffery Davis	
District Captain East (DCAPT-E) Lawrence Noland	
District Captain West (DCAPT-W) Walter Conway	
Immediate Past Commodore COMO Kurt P. Sarac Sr.	
President Past Commanders Assoc. Edwin W. Seda	
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DCDR 07	Lawrence Nolan
DCDR 08	Robert Ward
DCDR 12	Timothy Precht
DCDR 15	George A. Roth
DCDR 16	Kenneth Kappler
DCDR 17	Stanley Baxter
DCDR 18	David King Sr.
DCDR 19	Elizabeth A. Pittinger
DCDR 20	Stephen J. Bugaj

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D-AD-SP	Thomas J. Don
D-AD-CC	Jason C. Flynn
ASC	Diego Herrera
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DSO-FN	Mark F. Letavish
DLO	Francis P. Bigley
DSO-SL	William Castagno
DDC-Logistics	Robert G. Vanderhook
DSO-CS	Douglas R. Hoffman Sr.
DSO-CA	Mark Murdy
DSO-HR	Ruth A. Bearce
DSO-IS	Terry F. Bearce
DSO-PB	Timothy P Marks
DSO-SR	J. Douglas Willwerth
DDC-Prevention	Alfred O. Grimminger
DSO-AS	James Robert White
DSO-MS	Gregg R. Bollinger
DSO-MT	Robert G. Vanderhook
DSO-NS	Lorraine Bianco
DSO-PA	COMO K.C. Murphy
DSO-PE	Eric Keeny
DSO-PV	Timothy Precht
DSO-VE	Edwin W. Seda
DDC-Response	Vacant
DSO-EM	Pamela L. Thompson
DSO-CM	Richard B. Taylor II
DSO-AV	Carl S. Longenecker
DSO-OP	COMO Kurt P. Sarac Sr.

Front Cover: Southern New Jersey Auxiliarists in Division 08 enjoy a stunning sunset while conducting tasks to demonstrate proficiency in core competencies like firefighting, dewatering pumps, and towing.

See more on page 65

Photograph by COMO Joseph Giannattasio

From the Desk of the Commodore

As always, I want to begin by thanking each and every member for all that they do for the CG and our Auxiliary. Our members have been very busy over the last quarter. We commenced our RBS activities and Operations, we continue to support our Active-Duty in the galleys, CFVEs, ATON verifiers and as Watchstanders to name a few activities.

Our leadership team was invited to attend the Sector Delaware Bay Change of Command where Captain Kate Higgins-Bloom was relieved by the new Sector Commander Captain Roberto Rivera. The event was presided over by our new District Commander Admiral Zeita Merchant. We look forward to working with CAPT Rivera.

We bid a fond farewell to our Director, Commander Laura Moose. Commander Moose has served as our Director since 2023. She has led us through several government shutdowns and continuing resolutions. She was also very involved in the bridge collapse in Maryland working in the Incident Command. Commander retires, again, after more than 30 years of service. We wish her fair winds and following seas as she watches hockey games!

Our new Director is Commander Ryan Popiel. His most recent post was as Executive Officer at the Air Station Atlantic City. He is a 2005 graduate of the U.S. Coast Guard Academy where he earned a Bachelor of Science in Mechanical Engineering. Welcome aboard Commander.

Our members recently participated in the USA250 celebrations. We served in an operational capacity, patrolling Delaware Bay and the Schuylkill River. We were also involved in night patrols for celebratory fireworks. Our comms trailer was also manned and utilized for the events.

DTRAIN is scheduled for September 11 – 13 in Delaware, when we will swear in our new EX-COM leadership team. We have a variety of classes scheduled, with something for everyone! Registration is still open, join us for training and fellowship. We will also have the “lucky bag” on site if you need some uniforms. Uniform inspections can be completed there, you will also be able to have a current ID card printed as well as your portrait taken.



Commodore Noreen Schifini
District Commodore
U.S. Coast Guard Auxiliary
East District-Northern Region

Continued on the next page...

From the Desk of the Commodore, continued

As we move into the third quarter, please be sure to get your operation patrol hours completed. We can't wait until the end of September when there's no guarantee that we will be funded!

As always, we remain *Semper Paratus!*

Respectfully,



Noreen Schifini
District Commodore
USCG East District-Northern Region



From the Desk of the Chief of Staff

Shipmates,

As we head into the last two months of summer, boating activity is picking up and our work is especially important. Our communities count on the U.S. Coast Guard Auxiliary to help keep boaters safe, support Coast Guard missions, and be ready when we are needed.

This is a good time for each of us to refocus on our mission. Whether you are standing radio watch, going on patrol, teaching boating safety classes, doing vessel safety checks, helping with training, or guiding new members, your work matters. What you do makes a real difference.

I encourage everyone to review your qualifications, finish any required training, and look for ways to stay ready for the mission. Readiness is not something we do once and forget about. It takes regular training, teamwork, and a strong commitment to doing the job well.

Thank you for all you do to support the Coast Guard, our District, and the boating public. I hope you have a safe and successful rest of the summer, and I look forward to seeing what we accomplish together.

Semper Paratus,

Michael B. McElwee
District Chief of Staff
U.S. Coast Guard Auxiliary



Michael B. McElwee
Chief of Staff
U.S. Coast Guard Auxiliary
East District-Northern Region



Introducing CDR Popiel, DIRAUX

It is my distinct honor to introduce myself as the new Director of Auxiliary for the East District-Northern Region. Stepping into this role feels a bit like a homecoming, and I am thrilled to work alongside the dedicated volunteers who act as a crucial force multiplier for our Coast Guard missions.

My connection with the Auxiliary runs deep. As an H-65 “Dolphin” pilot, my first unit was Air Station Atlantic City where I served for over two years as the Auxiliary Liaison Officer, working directly with our CG AUX Air members from District 5 North and South. In that position, my affinity and appreciation for the Auxiliary grew immensely as we partnered to expand operational and logistics missions for our air facilities, pilots, and observers. Together, we met the growing demands for Air Intercept training and Search and Rescue response, and I saw firsthand the incredible impact you have on our service.

I bring to this position 21 years of Coast Guard experience with over 3,000 flight hours spanning myriad homeland security, joint interagency, and humanitarian missions. Most recently, I had the privilege of serving as the Executive Officer and second-in-command for Coast Guard Air Station Atlantic City. Throughout my career, my focus has been heavily rooted in engineering, aviation logistics, and safety. I served at the Aviation Logistics Center (ALC) in North Carolina, where I directed engineering policy and oversaw airworthiness assurance programs for the MH-65 and the fleet-wide aviation inventory. I also served as the Assistant Engineering Officer at Air Station Barbers Point, HI, and as an Engineering Officer in Training on CGC TAHOMA (WMEC 908).

I am a 2005 graduate of the U.S. Coast Guard Academy with a Bachelor of Science in Mechanical Engineering, and I earned my Master of Science in Aeronautics and Astronautics from Purdue University in 2019 – Boiler up! I have been proudly married to my wife, Karen, since 2011, and we are busy raising our three wonderful children: Avery, Liam, and Noah. Originally from Delaware County, Pennsylvania, we are excited to serve in this region once again.



Commander Ryan B. Popiel
Director of Auxiliary (DIRAUX)
EAST District-Northern Region
U.S. Coast Guard



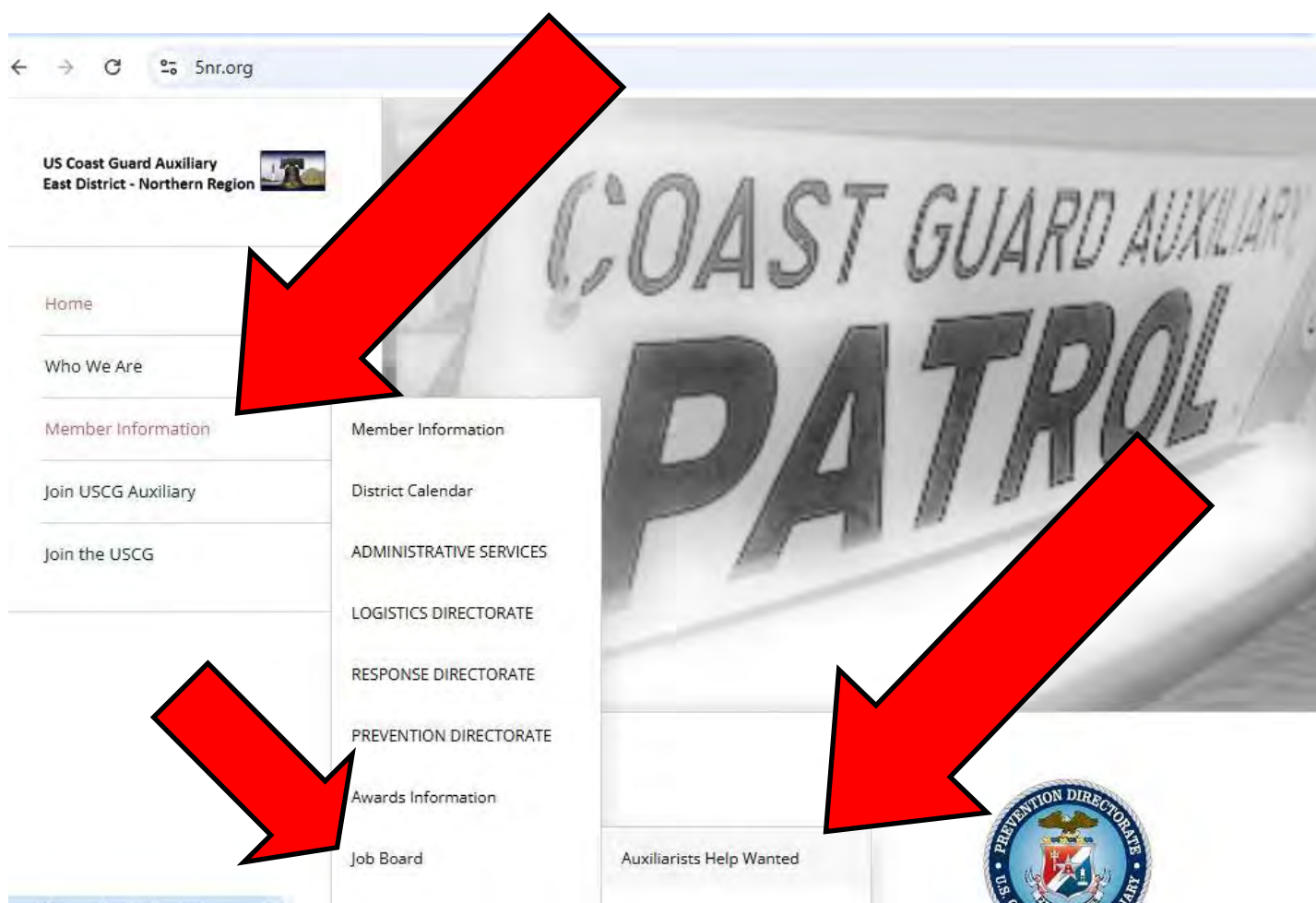
East District- Northern Region Help Needed



Job Board

To get to the District's job board:

- First, get on the website: <https://5nr.org>
- Next, hover over “Member Information” on the left (see below):
- Then, click on “Job Board”
- Finally, click on “AUX Help Wanted”



Information from Central Divisions



Division 4

Article by Thomas Siedenbuehl, DCDR

Division 4: Ready, Relevant, and Responsive - Building the Future Together

Division 4, Coast Guard District East–Northern Region (CGD-E-NR), occupies a unique and important position within the Coast Guard Auxiliary. Unlike many other divisions, we are entrusted with the ownership and stewardship of significant operational assets, including Facility 444 and the Training Center (TRACEN) and Search and Rescue Detachment (SARDET) facility at Marcus Hook, Pennsylvania.

These assets are far more than symbols of our Division, they are mission-critical resources that support operational readiness, training, and mission execution throughout the region. With these resources comes a tremendous responsibility, one that our members embrace with professionalism and pride.

We recognize that the success we enjoy today was built on the dedication and vision of those who came before us. Their commitment established the foundation upon which we continue to build, and we remain grateful for their leadership and lasting legacy.

Results That Matter

Division 4 accomplished a lot during 2026 because our members understand that results matter. Through thousands of hours of volunteer service, our Auxiliarists demonstrated what it means to be mission ready.

During the year, Division 4 members:

- Stood more than 200 hours of Quarterdeck Watch at Sector Delaware Bay, directly supporting active-duty operations.
- Provided over 2,300 hours of Marine Safety support, enhancing maritime safety and compliance.
- Completed more than 2,800 hours of member training, strengthening qualifications and operational readiness.
- Logged over 1,300 hours conducting Safety and Regatta Patrols, protecting recreational boaters and the maritime public.
- Contributed more than 700 hours of Coast Guard Operational Support and over 250 hours as Culinary As-sistants, directly augmenting Coast Guard missions.
- Performed over 8,000 hours of Coast Guard Administrative Support, ensuring essential operations continued efficiently behind the scenes.
- Conducted 529 Vessel Safety Checks and 247 Paddlecraft Safety Inspections, improving recreational boating safety through education and prevention.

In total, Division 4 members volunteered more than 19,200 hours in support of Coast Guard and Auxiliary missions.

Continued on the next page...

Division 4

Continued

While these numbers are impressive, they represent much more than statistics. Behind every hour served is a volunteer who chose to train, chose to stand the watch, and chose to serve our Nation while upholding the proud legacy of the United States Coast Guard Auxiliary.

This is what Ready, Relevant, and Responsive looks like in action.

Building the Future Through Partnership

One of Division 4's proudest accomplishments has been the outstanding cooperation among neighboring divisions.

Divisions 4 (Southeast Pennsylvania), 8 (New Jersey), and 17 (Penn-Jersey) partnered to conduct the 2026 Boat Crew School, demonstrating the very best of interdivisional collaboration and operational excellence.

The program was conducted in two concurrent classes and prepared more than 54 prospective boat crew members, representing a significant investment in the future operational capability of the Coast Guard Auxiliary.

This initiative exemplifies the vision of Force Design 2028 leveraging experience, embracing innovation, sharing resources, and expanding access to high-quality training without compromising excellence.

Special recognition goes to Peter Lacey (Division 4), Jim Maher (Division 17), and Eric Keeny (Division 8), whose exceptional leadership and coordination made this ambitious effort possible. Their professionalism, teamwork, and dedication reflect the very best of the Auxiliary and the Coast Guard.

The Boat Crew School represents far more than a successful training event. It demonstrates our collective commitment to preparing the next generation of operational Auxiliarists. Rather than waiting for the future, our divisions are actively building it.

Looking Ahead

As we continue through 2026, our Nation faces extraordinary opportunities and responsibilities. The celebration of America's 250th birthday, the FIFA World Cup, and our routine operational commitments will place increased demands on Coast Guard resources.

Division 4 stands ready.

Our mission is clear: to support our seven flotillas by ensuring they remain administratively, operationally, and culturally Mission Ready.

This commitment aligns directly with the vision outlined in U.S. Coast Guard Force Design, which recognizes the Coast Guard Auxiliary as an increasingly vital component of the Total Workforce. The strategy calls upon us to leverage private-sector expertise, strengthen recruiting efforts, expand mission support, and fully utilize the Auxiliary's unique authorities and capabilities.

Continued on the next page...

Division 4

Continued

Division leadership is committed to meeting that challenge. We will continue providing administrative support, training opportunities, leadership, and advocacy our Flotillas need to succeed. Above all, we will listen, support, and act in service to our members and the Coast Guard.

Together, we remain One Team, One Fight, living the Coast Guard Core Values of Honor, Respect, and Devotion to Duty.

Perhaps no words better capture the spirit of our Division than the motto of our Flotilla 04-09:

"Guardian of the Delaware River."

Those words reflect not only our geography, but our commitment to serving our communities, supporting the Coast Guard, and remaining Ready, Relevant, and Responsive. Today and for generations to come.



Division 12

Article by Timothy Precht, DCDR

Greetings East Region Northern District from the Division 12 DCDR. I am Tim Precht and have been in the Auxiliary since 2008. Division 12 is basically the lower 2 counties in the state of Delaware. Delaware being the second smallest state in the union, only has 3 counties. Kent County is where the state Capital is and Sussex County is where all the beaches are. Sussex County is also the home of 2 active-duty stations. Station Indian River, located just inside the Indian River Inlet and MSU (Marine Safety Unit) Lewes, located at the Roosevelt Inlet in Lewes, Delaware. And we are just across the Delaware Bay from the Coast Guard TRACEN Cape May.

Division 12 is made up of 4 Flotillas, Dover, Bowers Beach, Lewes and Station Indian River. The Division supports both active stations in several ways. At the MSU Lewes station, we Stand Watch and assist with building maintenance, cleaning and administrative duties. The station does have a radio set up so communications can be maintained during patrols or radio checks from the Marine Safety Technicians while they are inspecting T-Boats, freighters and cargo ships traveling up the Delaware Bay and into the Delaware River. Division 12 also has a member that is a Pollution Responder and has assisted during a pollution response. There is also a member that holds the UPV and CFVE qualifications. The station has billets for a Lieutenant, as the Commanding Officer, a CWO4 as the (XO) Executive Officer, another Chief Warrant Officer, a Chief Petty Officer, 4 Petty Officers and 1 Reserve Petty Officer.

Station Indian River is a station that supports primarily Law Enforcement and Search & Rescue. The station is commanded by a Chief Petty Officer (BMC) as the OIC (Officer in Charge), a BM1 (Boatswain's Mate 1st Class) as the (XPO) Executive Petty Officer, 2 BM1s as Training and Operations Officers, Petty Officers and non-rates serving as crews to serve aboard 2 47 foot boats, and 2 smaller fast boats. A CS1 (Culinary Specialist 1st class) heads the galley with a CS3. The Division has several CAs (Culinary Assistants) serving in the galley typically 4-5 days a week. In 2025, the Auxiliary assisted with preparing, cooking, serving and cleaning up 1773 meals. The Auxiliary Flotilla Station Indian River 12-09 meets there on a monthly basis. Division 12 also serves this station by standing Radio Watch and one Auxiliarist trains new non-rates for that qualification.

Division 12 typically patrols the Delaware Bay, the Indian River Bay and the Rehoboth Bay. We have worked with the active-duty with training for both Auxiliary crews and active-duty crews. We have had an excellent relationship with the station and even had an active-duty certified QE provide our crews with their Initial and 3-year qualifications.

Continued on the next page...



Division 12

Article by Timothy Precht, DCDR

Division 12 has been the host Auxiliary unit for years supporting the Special Olympics of Delaware Annual Polar Bear Plunge providing a safety line between the crowd and the water line until the masses jump into ice cold water in anything from bathing suits to full costumes. In 2025 there were 4,200 plungers (they call themselves bears) plus the thousands of spectators that watch this very odd event (my words. Jumping into freezing cold weather is just not my thing). *See the photo below.*

Where are we going now? Forward. We are always looking for members. Working in a resort area has its own problems and benefits. Areas of concentration this year has been recruitment for us, enlisted and the Coast Guard Academy. We all need more members so if you know someone that is looking to move to the beach and want to give back and serve with us, reach out.



Small portion of the crowd, courtesy from the Cape Gazette article

Division 17

*Article by Sheldon Slusser, FC
Bristol Flotilla 17-01*

All For One, One For All

Penn-Jersey Division, East District-Northern Region, is comprised of five flotillas: 17-01 Bristol, 17-02 Warminster, 17-03 Bensalem, 17-04 Bordentown, and 17-76 Penns Landing.

Our Area of Responsibility (AOR) encompasses the Delaware River from Trenton, NJ, downstream to the Philadelphia Navy Yard, with operational reach across Burlington, Mercer, and Hunterdon counties in New Jersey, as well as Philadelphia, Bucks, Montgomery, Northampton, Monroe, Pike, and Wayne counties in Pennsylvania.

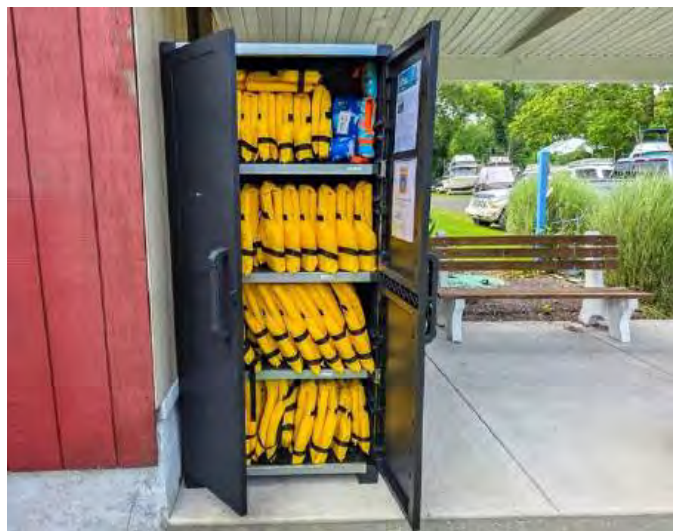
The Division also maintains and staffs the Search and Rescue Detachment (SARDET) facility in Bordentown, NJ, ensuring readiness and support for Coast Guard operations throughout the region.

Each flotilla brings its own strengths, specialties, and community connections, complementing one another to form a cohesive, mission-ready division. As diverse as our members are, so are the missions we undertake.

A significant portion of our auxiliarists serve within the Recreational Boating Safety (RBS) programs—the core mission of the Auxiliary. This includes:

- Vessel Safety Examinations (VE): Ensuring recreational vessels meet federal safety standards.
- RBS Program Visitation (PV): Partnering with marine dealers and other businesses to promote safe boating practices.
- Public Education (PE): Teaching boating safety courses and helping the public obtain required certifications.
- Community Outreach: Flotilla 17-01 Bristol operates and maintains a Life Jacket Loaner Station, in partnership with Sea Tow and the Bristol Yacht Club.

These programs form the foundation of our service, but they are only the beginning of the many ways Penn-Jersey Division supports the Coast Guard and our maritime communities.



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Division 17

Continued



Surface Operations, not too long ago, operated at the bare minimum within Division 17. Recognizing the need to strengthen our presence on the Delaware River and expand opportunities for member involvement, our SO-OP launched a major initiative at the beginning of 2025. Working collaboratively with our neighboring divisions, Division 4 (Southeast Pennsylvania) and Division 8 (New Jersey), he helped develop a combined, region-wide operational training program. This joint effort significantly broadened the pipeline for new Boat Crew candidates and unified operational standards across the three divisions.

The resulting course prepared more than 50 prospective auxiliarists to begin their journey toward Boat Crew qualification, marking one of the largest and most successful operational training efforts our division has seen in years. It not only revitalized Surface Operations within Division 17 but also strengthened inter-division cooperation and increased the Auxiliary's operational readiness along the Delaware River.

Several of our members also serve in land-based operational capacities as Watchstanders on the quarterdeck at Sector Delaware Bay and Telecommunications Operators at one of the SARDET's in the AOR. Their commitment in these roles directly enhances the Sector's operational readiness. By standing the watch, our auxiliarists act as a force multiplier, allowing active-duty personnel to be reassigned to other critical duties throughout the base. This contribution, quiet, consistent, and highly professional, demonstrates the Auxiliary's value as an integrated part of the Coast Guard team. It strengthens Sector Delaware Bay's ability to respond, coordinate, and maintain situational awareness across the region.

Division 17 also maintains a strong presence within the Marine Safety mission set. Our members serve in a wide range of specialized qualifications within the Prevention and Response shops, including Uninspected Passenger Vessel Examiners (UPV), Commercial Fishing Vessel Safety Examiners (CFVE), Assistant Facility Inspectors, Assistant Container Inspectors, and Assistant Pollution Responders.

This commitment to Marine Safety has yielded exceptional results: two of our members have earned the Auxiliary Marine Safety M-Pro Pin, a distinction awarded to auxiliarists who complete at least four Marine Safety program qualifications, demonstrating both dedication and advanced competency in support of Coast Guard missions.

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Division 17

Continued



Beyond Marine Safety, Division 17's capabilities extend across numerous additional programs. Our members serve in Navigation Systems as ATON and PATON verifiers, ensuring aids to navigation remain accurate and reliable for the maritime public. Others contribute through the Auxiliary Medical Corps, Auxiliary Chaplain Service, and Auxiliary Interpreter Corps, providing professional support that enhances Coast Guard readiness and community engagement.

We also maintain active participation in Public Affairs, helping communicate the Auxiliary's mission to the public, and in Culinary Assistance, supporting Coast Guard units during operations, events, and high-tempo periods.



Continued on the next page...

Division 17

Continued

Together, these diverse specialties reflect the depth, professionalism, and versatility of Division 17, an organization whose members continually step forward to serve wherever they are needed.



Picture Credits:

Page 1 of article (top) - Aerial view of Division NSBW event participants at Neshaminy Marina in Croydon, PA. [John Pignatelli]

Page 1 of article (bottom) - Lifejacket Loaner Station at Bristol Yacht Club [Sheldon Slusser PA2]

Page 2 of article - Multi-Divisional Boat Crew Class at TRACEN Marcus Hook [unknown]

Page 3 of article (left) - Auxiliarists Jeff Davis and Sheldon Slusser with Capt. Higgins-Bloom after receiving the Auxiliary M-Pin at Sector Delaware Bay. [unknown]

Page 3 of article (right) - Auxiliarists Jeff Davis and Sheldon Slusser during container inspections at Packer Terminal [MST3 Calhoun]

Page 3 of article (right) - Auxiliary and active duty working together during container inspections at Penn Terminal [MST3 Calhoun]

Page 4 of article - Division 17 members at West Marine, Bensalem, PA, for a VSC/Public Affairs event. [Aux Sheldon Slusser PA2]

Information from The Prevention Directorate



Marine Safety

Article by Gregg Bollinger DSO-MS

CGD-E-NR MS Department Accomplishments

- CFVE ADSO, Sheldon Slusser and UPV ADSO Jeff Davis are both working writing/revising reference books in their respective areas.
- ADSO-MS (Qualifications), Rick Young, has developed an online “Good Mate” course and IMSEP exam. A Meritorious Commendation has been drafted recognizing the efforts of the MS Academy faculty. A “starter” session for MSAM or MEES is planned for the Fall DTRAIN.
- ADSO-MS (E), Anna Ackaway has been leading the effort in her AOR to promote both public and internal education concerning the North Atlantic Right Whale and other topics.
- ADSO-MS (C), John DeSimone, has developed a Power Point presentation available on the District MS webpage, on the topic of “Dual Missions” (combining MS/EP outreach with VEs).
- Auxiliarists James DeScala and Lorraine Bianco conducted a MS outreach booth at the World Environmental Day, 04 June, at New Castle, DE. The Delaware River and Bay Authority presented them with a trophy for their 10 years of participation at the event.



Gregg Bollinger
District Staff Officer
Marine Safety

Year-to-Date Accomplishments

- CFVEs: 34; Outreach Hours: 11; Training Hours: 55.5
- UPV Exams: 10
- MEES Qualifications: 29
- MSAM Qualifications: 09
- MS Outreach: 40 Hours



Navigation Systems

Article by Lorraine Bianco DSO-NS

Navigation Systems auxiliarists work with the Aids to Navigation Team (ANT) to identify discrepancies in the navigational information on the waterways. There are three ANT units in the East District, ANT Cape May, ANT Philadelphia and ANT Chincoteague. While the Coast Guard is busy with approximately 6800 federal Aids to Navigation (ATON) in District East, the auxiliary has been tasked with identifying and verifying close to 800 Private Aids to Navigation (PATON). These PATONs placed by marinas, schools, research facilities and aquaculture areas to name a few marks the navigable waters in their proximity. These are checked on a schedule based upon the designated class of PATON. Class I in highly traveled waters are checked every year. Class II are checked every 3 years and Class III are checked every 5 years. While predominately working with PATONs verifiers also do bridge surveys and chart updating.

The Coast Guard Auxiliary Aids to Navigation Program is the reference guide to help complete the Aids to Navigation Verifier (AV) and the Performance Qualification Standard (PQS) to become a certified Auxiliary Aids to Navigation Verifier. Currently there are 23 verifiers in the district. There are a few verifiers I would like to give a shout out this year.



Lorraine Bianco
District Staff Officer -
Navigation Systems

ADSO-W Edwin Hilscher 15-09 works with Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission to verify PATONs on the lakes and rivers in Pennsylvania.

Mark Diseveria 18-05 who helps in ANT Philadelphia to enter verifications/discrepancies in USAIMS and to update charts.

Mark Cofone 04-09, John Gallagher 12-09, George Heesh 12-09, and David Kressler 12-09 have done a great jobs in verifying PATONs on the Delaware River and in Delaware.

I recently attend C-School Aux 06 in Yorktown VA. Aux 06, (25 hour class over a weekend) is the Aids to Navigation, Bridges and Chart updating. It has given me a better understanding of the Auxiliary mission to augment the Coast Guard mission.



Public Education

Article by Eric T Keeny, DSO-PE

Public Education: Making a Difference Across the East District-Northern Region

One of the most important missions of the U.S. Coast Guard Auxiliary is preventing accidents before they happen. While many people recognize the Auxiliary for its patrols, vessel safety checks, and support of Coast Guard operations, one of its greatest contributions to recreational boating safety happens in the classroom through the Public Education (PE) Program.

Across the East District-Northern Region (CGD-E-NR), more than **100 certified Auxiliary instructors** have dedicated countless volunteer hours this year to educating recreational boaters. Their commitment has resulted in over **900 students** successfully completing boating safety courses and seminars, giving them the knowledge and confidence to safely enjoy our nation's waterways.

These impressive numbers represent far more than statistics. They represent families who are better prepared for emergencies, boat operators who understand the Rules of the Road, and recreational boaters who recognize the importance of proper safety equipment, weather awareness, and responsible decision-making. Every student taught has the potential to prevent an accident, injury, or even the loss of life.

The Auxiliary's Public Education Program offers courses for every level of experience, from first-time boat owners to seasoned mariners looking to refresh their knowledge. Popular offerings include ***About Boating Safely***, ***Boating Skills and Seamanship***, GPS and electronic navigation, paddlecraft safety, sailing courses, and specialty seminars covering topics such as docking, trailering, and emergency procedures.

For many students, these classes also satisfy state boating education requirements while providing practical, real-world instruction from experienced volunteer instructors. Many Auxiliary instructors bring decades of boating experience, maritime careers, military service, emergency response backgrounds, and Coast Guard operational expertise into every classroom.

The success of the East District-Northern Region's Public Education Program is a direct reflection of the dedication of its instructors. Preparing lesson plans, maintaining instructor certifications, scheduling classes, coordinating with flotillas, and volunteering evenings and weekends all require an extraordinary commitment to public service. Their efforts help ensure that boaters are prepared long before they ever leave the dock.

Education remains one of the most effective tools in reducing recreational boating accidents. Every class taught strengthens the Coast Guard's Recreational Boating Safety mission by promoting safe boating practices, increasing compliance with boating laws, and encouraging responsible seamanship throughout our communities.

As the boating season continues, the East District-Northern Region's instructors remain committed to expanding their reach and sharing their knowledge with even more recreational boaters. Whether teaching a first-time boater or an experienced captain, every lesson contributes to safer waterways for everyone.

The achievements of **more than 100 instructors** and over **900 students trained** this year demonstrate the impact dedicated volunteers can have when they invest their time and expertise in their communities. Their work exemplifies the U.S. Coast Guard Auxiliary's motto: ***Semper Paratus—Always Ready***.

Safe boating doesn't begin when you cast off the lines—it begins with education.

Vessel Examiners

Article by Ed Seda DSO-VE

Vessel Examiner Activity

The Vessel Examiners of East District Northern Region (EDNR) continue to excel in providing Recreational Boating Safety guidance to the boating public throughout the district.

To date (YTD 1 August) these dedicated members have completed almost 4,000 VSC's with a notable increase in Paddlecraft VSC's.

Replenishments of VSC decals have improved this year as each DSO-VE has been given a surplus to distribute as needed for resupply and pop up VSC events. This places the decals in the district for quicker and more geographically direct distribution.

The paddlecraft community has become a priority target of Vessel Examiners. Increasing paddle craft injuries and fatalities nationally highlight the need for increased outreach with experienced and knowledgeable examiners to better inform the boating public.

To this end, Margaret Gering, CGD-E-NR's Auxiliary Paddlecraft Safety Program (AUXPAD) Coordinator, Qualifier (AQ), and ADSO-VE PAD has completed instruction on extended paddle craft inspection to 73 members. This one-hour workshop was provided in person and via ZOOM and has given the Vessel Examiner a model of a VSC and safety talk that addresses paddler specific safety issues.

Some of the points emphasized in the presentation are shown below and this makes a ready reference guide for the VE when performing a VSC on a paddlecraft.

PADDLE CRAFT VSC MAY BE THE ONLY SAFETY EDUCATION A PADDLER RECEIVES.

1. WEAR A PFD

- a. Right Size, Right Fit, Right Type for activity
- b. Inflatables not for children under 16 or persons under 80lb, not for impact or whitewater
- c. 12 and under while underway all year
- d. Cold weather – November-end of April everyone must wear
- e. Not all PFDs will roll the wearer face up-must have some swimming ability

2. SOUND PRODUCING DEVICE-example: pea less coach's whistle or air horn

- a. Federal, state and local rules usually require paddlecraft to have some means of making an efficient sound signal audible for at least one-half mile
 - i. Five (5) or more SHORT LOUD BLASTS-if uncertainty between vessels or risk of collision (rule 34d)
 - ii. Continuous blast- for distress (very long) to summon help
- b. DO NOT TIE WHISTLE AROUND NECK.
- c. Tie to bathing suit or life jacket if worn.

Continued on the next page...

Vessel Examiners

Continued

3. SINGLE WHITE LIGHT-(nav rule 25)

- a. Must have ready at hand an electric torch or lighted lantern showing a white light which shall be exhibited in sufficient time to prevent collision (ACR C light, flashlight for example)
- b. If mounted on a pole at the stern it must be higher than the boater's head for 360-degree visibility.
- c. Red/Green bow and stern white light-may have them, but only required if motorized or per local requirement.
- d. The light rule applies to the hours between sunset and sunrise (not dark to dawn) and during periods of restricted visibility, such as fog and heavy rain.

4. WEATHER AND WATER

- a. Be prepared for immersion EVERY TIME-dress for **WATER TEMP**
 - i. COLD WATER KILLS. Hypothermia risk when water is 70°F and below with
MAXIMUM INTENSITY COLD SHOCK at water temp 50-60°F and below
 1. Involuntary gasp and drown; Cold water shock rapidly leads to incapacitation and hypothermia
 2. Wear appropriate layers, wetsuit, or drysuit-if trained in their use.
 3. Carry dry clothes and extra layers in a dry bag-NO COTTON
 - ii. Hyperthermia risk in warm weather-hydrate, sunscreen, wicking clothing

5. FLOTATION IN BOAT

- a. Bulkheads or added float bags fore and aft displace water and keep boat afloat
- b. structural foam column provides limited flotation
- c. dewatering-carry a bilge pump, cup
- d. Paddle close to shore in case need to swim with boat

6. COMMUNICATION

- a. Mobile phone in dry bag
- b. VHF radio-MAYDAY, PAN PAN
- c. VISUAL DISTRESS SIGNALS-day
 - i. wave paddle over your head side to side for help wanted
 - ii. wave arms up and down and call "help"
 - iii. NOTE: know the laws pertaining to the waters being paddled. VDS requirements may apply to certain waters. Know before you go.

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Vessel Examiners

Continued

7. LEAVE A FLOAT PLAN with a responsible person on shore

- a. WHO is going, WHERE, WHEN leaving and returning
- b. WHAT TO DO if no return/response

8. LABEL YOUR PADDLE AND BOAT

If found-contact can ensure paddler safety and return of equipment

9. VISIBILITY

- a. Bright color clothing and equipment, including boat and PFD
- b. Reflective paddle stickers or tapes
- c. Low in water, slow moving and often in shadows near shore-emphasize need for high visibility
- d. Advise against adding lights other than proscribed by nav rules can put paddlers at risk especially at night

10. TAKE A BOATING SAFETY CLASS

- a. Paddlecraft are vessels like any other and must abide by the nav rules
- b. Paddlers do not have right of way over others-learn the “pecking order” and the “rules of the road”
- c. Courtesy at launches and acting responsibly in navigating shared waters with other boaters
- d. Must maintain a lookout and assess risk to avoid collision
- e. Accident reporting and BUI-it’s the law

11. TAKE A PADDLING CLASS

- a. Proper paddling technique to avoid fatigue and injury
- b. Methods of rescuing self and others (paddle near shore until trained)
- c. Managing emergencies on the water
- d. Environmental stewardship, leave no trace, clean drain dry, wildlife protection
- e. Navigation-maps, charts, compass
- f. Weather, changing weather and preparedness
- g. American Canoe Assoc (ACA), paddling clubs have qualified instructors

BECOME A VESSEL EXAMINER

Keep our waterways and boaters safe by providing free safety checks, education, and peace of mind. Your training can make a real difference—join the team! An introduction to this critical mission is being presented at the Fall 2026 D-Train followed by Margaret Gering’s paddlecraft for Vessel Examiners presentation.

Program Visitors

Article by Timothy Precht, DSO-PV

Hello from the DSO-PV, Tim Precht. This is my first year as the DSO-PV so please bear with me. You may know this stuff but maybe I can share a little different light on the program.

What is this PV (Program Visitation) program all about? Well, you might know it is where a member meets with a location person and first sets up a display. Then they are expected to keep that display full of information concerning boating safety, the auxiliary, state and federal regulations, and other pamphlets but that is not all. It can be used to post a notice of an upcoming Public Education class or a Vessel Safety Check Station, with the permission of the location. And an ideal opportunity to see if that business would like to host one of these events.

But the program can and should be much more. First and foremost, it is a great way for a new member to get involved. If they feel a little uneasy talking to a business so early in their career, work with an experienced person, which is actually part of the training program. So, to get started, the member needs to go through the PV materials and take the online test, it is not hard. Then they have to go with someone that holds the qualification for 2 visits, and they are logged into AuxData as a trainee. Once the test is entered and they complete these initial visits, its off the races.

Once qualified or during the qualification phase, talk with fellow Auxiliarists that are performing this and see if there are any locations that could help or suggestions on new locations. Let's face it, this is not a competition about who gets the most visits, it is more important to get the information out to the public. These visits have also proven to be a good place to recruit new members, but you have to talk with people.

All visits are to be entered into AuxData, yes, I know everything goes into AuxData. But if it isn't in the system "it didn't happen". Make sure you log the time and the number but also the actual locations you went to. This allows reports to be pulled to see what locations are covered and where "holes" are. If you do too many visits on one day, where there is not enough room in the block in AuxData, ask yourself, are you doing the program justice or just trying to get high numbers. It's not a numbers game.

So, what are the benefits and what do you get out of it. If you're the type of person that needs to see something out of what you are doing, and there is nothing wrong with that, for every PV you do, it counts toward the points needed to earn the RBS pin.



Check out this web page on number of points and what qualifies for the pin: [Click Here](#)

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Program Visitors

Article by Timothy Precht, DSO-PV

And then there is the ribbon. Once you are qualified you should be awarded the VE/RESVP ribbon along with the certificate. The VE/RBSVP Service award is awarded for completing a total of 60 or more visits in a year which adds stars to the ribbon.



So, what else? From a bigger picture, you are getting boating safety and other information out to the public, as I mentioned earlier. RSB is our number 1 mission given to us by the US Coast Guard Commandant. Yes, it is still the number 1 mission. During your visits you can also help set up and schedule Vessel Safety Check stations, schedule a boating class, boating safety booths and public events, to name just a few. You are ALSO getting the Auxiliary more exposure and quite possibly find someone that wants to know more or join the Auxiliary. It can be very rewarding if you let it be. Take pride in serving the public.

Remember - this is NOT a competition but a means to at least get boating safety information out to the public and help save lives.



Information from Around the District



The Renamed Coast Guard Districts

Legacy CG District Name	New CG District Name	New CG District Abbreviation	Legacy Auxiliary District/Region Name	New Auxiliary District/Region Name	New Auxiliary District/Region Abbreviation	AUXDATA Code
USCG First District	USCG Northeast District	CGD-NE	First Northern Region	USCG Northeast District - Northern Region	CGD-NE-NR	013
			First Southern Region	USCG Northeast District - Southern Region	CGD-NE-SR	014
USCG Fifth District	USCG East District	CGD-E	Fifth Northern Region	USCG East District - Northern Region	CGD-E-NR	053
			Fifth Southern Region	USCG East District - Southern Region	CGD-E-SR	054
USCG Seventh District	USCG Southeast District	CGD-SE	Seventh District	USCG Southeast District	CGD-SE	070
USCG Eighth District	USCG Heartland District	CGD-H	Eighth Western Rivers	USCG Heartland District - Western Rivers	CGD-H-WR	085
			Eighth Eastern Region	USCG Heartland District - Eastern Region	CGD-H-ER	082
			Eighth Coastal Region	USCG Heartland District - Coastal Region	CGD-H-CR	081
USCG Ninth District	USCG Great Lakes District	CGD-GL	Ninth Western Region	USCG Great Lakes District - Western Region	CGD-GL-WR	095



The Renamed Coast Guard Districts

			Ninth Eastern Region	USCG Great Lakes District - Eastern Region	CGD-GL-ER	092
			Ninth Central Region	USCG Great Lakes District - Central Region	CGD-GL-CR	091
USCG Eleventh District	USCG Southwest District	CGD-SW	Eleventh Northern Region	USCG Southwest District – Northern Region	CGD-SW-NR	113
			Eleventh Southern Region	USCG Southwest District – Southern Region	CGD-SW-SR	114
USCG Thirteenth District	USCG Northwest District	CGD-NW	Thirteenth District	USCG Northwest District	CGD-NW	130
USCG Fourteenth District	USCG Oceania District	CGD-O	Fourteenth District	USCG Oceania District	CGD-O	140
USCG Seventeenth District	USCG Arctic District	CGD-A	Seventeenth District	USCG Arctic District	CGD-A	170



Plastic Pollution from Ships

Article by Gregg Bollinger, DSO-MS

Introduction: MARPOL Annex V, Prevention of Pollution by Garbage from Ships, has been in existence since 1988. MARPOL or the International Convention for the Prevention of Pollution from Ships, is an international agreement aimed at prevention of pollution by ships either operationally or accidentally. There are six annexes dealing with different types of pollution with Annex V dealing with garbage of different types as well as their disposal with respect to amount of distance from shorelines. Most importantly, the annex contains a ban on disposal of all types of plastics into the sea. Record-keeping of garbage disposal and reporting of lost fishing gear is included.

This article is designed to be a motivation to learn more on an independent basis, about the topic of plastic pollution at sea. Questions are embedded in the text to stimulate thinking about small segments of the material and may or may not have one, exclusive, definitive answer.

This topic is very germane to the purpose of the USCG/USCGAUX Sea Partners Program with which everyone is encouraged to become more involved. Sea Partners, briefly stated, is the Gold Side program existing to educate the public concerning the necessity of marine environmental protection practices and policies being implemented. The Auxiliary is often the “tip of the spear” in executing the Sea Partners mission.

Part One

Carried along by currents of oceanic gyres, marine debris is creating patches in our oceans. Five patches have been identified worldwide such as the Great Pacific Garbage Patch or GPGP. Items in these patches range from fishing nets to microplastics or pieces that are less than 5 mm. Small but mighty, so-to-speak, microplastics make up approximately 94% of the estimated 1.8 million pieces of debris in the world’s oceans.

In combatting plastic pollution which, needless to say, is harmful to sea life, we must identify its source. It is estimated that upwards of 20 percent of fishing gear lost at sea is due to accidents, bad weather, gear problems, en-tanglement and/or intentional abandonment. A 2021 study by The Nature Conservancy and the University of California, Santa Barbara with the Pelagic Research Group and Hawaii Pacific University, reveals an estimated 100 million pounds of plastic pollution enters oceans yearly due to lost fishing gear.

Question: What are two identified sources of oceanic plastic pollution?

Microplastics litter beaches, oceans and harm birds, fish, sea turtles and mammals. Microplastics originate from plastic pellets, the “building blocks” if you will, of manufactured plastic products. Early on, the response to plastic pellet pollution was lacking in effectiveness due to lack of guidelines for conducting cleanup operations. IMO members since then have drafted guidance for response to plastic pellet spills. The Action Plan to Address Marine Plastic Litter from Ships was adopted in 2021 identifying MARPOL as the desired agent of expanding enforcement of existing requirements as well as developing and implementing new ones.

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Plastic Pollution from Ships

Continued

Proposed measures include:

- Expansion of garbage record-keeping for vessels of 400 gross tons and up and vessels of 100 gross tons and up. This brought in a new vessel “population” such as smaller fishing vessels which previously had not been required to keep records of garbage
- Making marking of fishing gear mandatory
- Mandatory reporting of all fishing gear losses

Marking of gear encourages retrieval and buy-back programs of gear. The U.S., while a signatory of MARPOL, has not ratified the gear-marking requirement because its position is that it does not promote pollution prevention and is a fisheries management concern and not a MARPOL one.

Question: What action has the IMO taken to fight plastic pellet pollution? What are specific actions?

The IMO plan includes loss of containers. Currently, only the reporting of lost containers is required. In 2021, the MV X-Press Pearl caught fire off the coast of Colombo, Sri Lanka, spilling billions of plastic pellets into the sea. Annex III is where regulations for the prevention of pollution by harmful substances carried in packaged form are found. Currently, a harmful substance is defined as such by how toxic it is. There is general agreement that plastic pellets are harmful to marine life and environments, it is, however, technically indirectly related to its makeup of what are considered toxic elements. With this interpretation, plastic pellets do not currently meet the definition of harmful substances under Annex III. Amendments addressing this discrepancy have been proposed. While regulations are in place, enforcement is a different story. Some countries do not have the resources to enforce MARPOL regulations while in other areas, an apparent “The ocean is a huge place, nobody will notice if we dump plastics overboard” attitude prevails.

The U.N. has become involved in the plastic pollution problem, adopting UNEA-5.2, adopted resolution 5/14, End plastic pollution in February 2022. The question remains about how binding this resolution can be without active enforcement. The U.S. will most likely lead the way with regard to enforcement of the resolution. There are 20 Federal agencies that attend interagency meetings of the State Department’s Office of Environmental Quality but only NOAA, the EPA and the U.S. Coast Guard have primary authority in prevention of/response to maritime plastic pollution. Our Auxiliary Sea Partners Program is an important element in the role of the Coast Guard in combatting this problem. Check out the Sea Partners website, particularly the Sea Partners Training Guide.

Question: Why can it be said that plastic pellets are simultaneously “harmful” and “not harmful”? What role does the Coast Guard and the Auxiliary play in dealing with plastic pollution?

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Plastic Pollution from Ships

Continued

NOAA has a Marine Debris Program that attempts to understand the effects of marine debris and the reduction of it in the oceans. Studies are made and reports made on sources and impact of derelict fishing gear, innovative uses of plastic waste and the U.S. contribution to global plastic pollution. NOAA also contributes through its National Fisheries Management Service providing guidance and knowledge regarding fishing vessels.

The EPA is responsible for keeping U.S. waters clean as authorized under the Clean Water Act. “Trash-Free Waters” is a program focusing on reduction of the source of trash entering our waters and trash capture along with research and community engagement projects at municipal, state and regional levels.

The Coast Guard directly impacts vessel operations by developing, and enforcing pollution prevention regulations. Coast Guard vessel inspectors ensure vessel operators adhere to MARPOL Annex V requirements as they are codified in 33 US Code of Federal Regulation. The Coast Guard and the Auxiliary joint Sea Partners Program is involved in prevention of plastic pollution but until plastics are considered a hazardous substance or its presence in the water presents a hazard to navigation, the Coast Guard is limited in its authority to respond such as it would to an oil spill. Prevention, such as the Sea Partners program, remains paramount.

Question: What three federal agencies have primary authority to prevent or respond to plastics in the marine environment?

Something “Fishy” About These Fishing Boats

Article by Gregg Bollinger, DSO-MS

Along with the People’s Liberation Army Navy (PLAN), the China Coast Guard; the Maritime Militia or “Fishing Militia,” comprise the means by which the People’s Republic of China (PRC) conducts maritime operations. The U.S. military’s name for the Maritime Militia is the “People’s Armed Forces Maritime Militia” or PAFMM.

The Maritime Militia has been around since the beginning of the PRC in 1949 with the outlook that a “people’s sea war” would include fishermen and other maritime workers. In the 1950’s, the Bureau of Aquatic Products began the process of organizing and strengthening the PAFMM by collectivizing fisheries. The Soviet influence was felt by adoption of the Soviet-developed “Young School” military theory emphasizing coastal defense rather than projection of naval power for communist countries just starting out.

By the late 1970’s, the PAFMM began to move away from the “Young School” model and increasingly ventured farther into the South China Sea. In the 2000’s, the PAFMM stepped-up its practice of harassment of U.S. and other nations’ fishing, merchant and naval vessels. Through the help of the PAFMM with its harassment of foreign fishing vessels, there has been an increase in illegal, unreported fishing. Recent satellite images reveal over one hundred militia vessels operating on a daily basis in the South China Sea.

The “Fishing Militia” combines maritime militia fishing vessels (MMFVs) with regular fishing boats or what are termed Spratly Backbone Fishing Vessels (SBFVs). These vessels range in size from 147’ to 213’. With most of the SBFVs owned by private individuals, the crews maintain jobs in the maritime economy sector as well as being

Something “Fishy” About These Fishing Boats

Continued

prepared at any time to serve as a militia force. These vessels mainly rely upon ramming techniques (being fitted with reinforced bows), water cannons and anti-aircraft weapons (mainly on the MMFVs), naval mines and small arms to harass foreign fishing, merchant and naval vessels.

Maritime sovereignty-assertion missions occupy a great deal of the attention of the PAFMM. These disputes revolve around islands as well as freedom of navigation claims. The PAFMM and the China Coast Guard are actual-ly deployed more often than the PLAN in these operations referred to as “gray zone operations.”

Sometimes, due to the relatively unclear Command and Control guidelines, some PAFMM members frequently advance their own fortunes contrary to government wishes such as when some members used Maritime Militia rationale for going after endangered and/or protected species in disputed waters.

The PAFMM or “Fishing Militia” is a “maverick arm of Chinese military power which is growing, requiring increased vigilance to protect U.S. naval and maritime interests.

A recent example of the activities and tactics of the PAFMM has been occurring since April of 2024. Most recently (26 AUG 2024), a re-supply mission to the Philippine Coast Guard’s flagship, BRP (Barkong Republikang Pilipinas) Teresa Magbunua (MRRV-9701) has been and as of this writing, continues to be blocked from free navigation by some 40 Chinese vessels including PAFMM or “Chinese Fishing Militia” vessels. A Chinese PLAN Type 075 “flattop” and Type 071 amphibious vessel have also been spotted near the South China Sea Island of Escoda, scene of the standoff.

On 26 AUG 2024, a re-supply mission was blocked by the Chinese. It was to bring food, supplies, a group of journalists and even a “special ice cream treat” from Commandant Admiral Ronnie Gil Gavan for the Teresa Magbanua’s beleaguered crew to celebrate Philippine “National Heroes Day.”

The blockade has consisted of three (3) PLAN warships, six (6) cutters and 31 PAFMM vessels which underscores the fact, previously-cited, that the “Chinese Fishing Militia” has the most interaction among the Chinese naval forces of a hostile nature with foreign vessels.

Using the previously-mentioned standard Chinese Fishing Militia tactics, on 22 AUG the Philippine BRP Cape Engano (MRRV-4411) was rammed, making a 1.5-meter-wide hole in its hull. That marked the sixth incident since April.

A provisional agreement eased the tense situation temporarily but hostilities have bubbled-up once again when a Philippine Navy Seal lost a finger during an incident at the Second Thomas Shoal. Re-supply attempts of the Philippine flagship have also ramped-up tensions.

N.B.: Information for writing this article was drawn from The Maritime Executive of 24 FEB 2024, the Wikipedia entry for the PAFMM and the United States Naval Institute (USNI) website.

The Silver Side: A Vital Partner to the U.S. Coast Guard

Article by Leon C. DeFulgentis, AuxPA1

When Americans think of maritime safety and security, images of massive white cutters on the high seas or orange helicopters executing daring rescues usually come to mind. These are the brave men and women of the active-duty & reserve United States Coast Guard. On a daily basis these individuals protect, defend, and save lives across U.S. ports, waterways, and international waters. Their core functions include search and rescue, drug and migrant interdiction, maritime law enforcement, port security, environmental protection (oil spills), and maintaining aids to navigation. Yet, operating alongside them is a vital and often understated partner that serves as a critical cornerstone of our nation's waterway safety net: the U.S. Coast Guard Auxiliary.

Established by Congress in 1939, the U.S. Coast Guard Auxiliary is the uniformed, all-volunteer component of the Coast Guard. The Auxiliary does not carry weapons and are not permitted to conduct military or law enforcement actions. Instead, their arsenal is composed of dedication, seamanship, and a profound commitment to public service. To understand the importance of the Auxiliary, one must understand the concept of "force multiplier." The active-duty Coast Guard is stretched thin, tasked with everything from migrant patrols and national defense missions to high-seas drug interdiction. When an Auxiliarist is patrolling a local harbor, conducting a safety patrol, providing culinary support, or standing radio watch at a station, it frees up an active-duty or reserve crew member for other critical tasks.

The Auxiliary's greatest impact, however, is arguably in prevention. The most effective search and rescue mission is the one that never needs to happen. The Auxiliary is the nation's premier resource for recreational boating safety education. The Auxiliary instructs tens of thousands of boaters annually in courses ranging from basic seamanship to advanced coastal navigation. The free Vessel Safety Check (VSC) program is a lifesaver. Auxiliarists meet boaters at marinas and boat launch ramps to examine their vessels for necessary safety equipment. Life jackets, flares, fire extinguishers, navigation lights, and other items onboard are all checked free of charge and with no penalty for non-compliance. The examiner also raises awareness by discussing safety topics such as the importance of float plans, fuel management, and boating safely at night all while conducting the vessel safety check. These interactions not only ensure boats are seaworthy but also build a bridge of trust between the boating public and the Coast Guard. When trouble does arise, Auxiliarists are often the first responders. Using their own privately owned boats and aircraft, which are maintained at their own expense, qualified Auxiliarists perform thousands of search and rescue missions every year. They tow disabled vessels to safety, assist craft in distress during storms, and provide vital eyes in the sky searching for lost boaters or environmental hazards like oil spills.



Photograph by Auxiliary Helo Ops. Team

The Silver Side: A Vital Partner to the U.S. Coast Guard

Continued

The value of the U.S. Coast Guard Auxiliary is immense. There are approximately 21,000 volunteers-neighbors, teachers, retirees, mechanics, health care workers-donating millions of hours annually. They provide an irreplaceable service to the taxpayer, offering a massive return on a minimal federal investment. In an era where waterways are crowded with new and inexperienced boaters, the presence of the “Silver Side” of the Coast Guard is more crucial than ever. The Auxiliary acts as a stabilizing presence, a source of knowledge, and a ready hand in times of trouble. The U.S. Coast Guard Auxiliary is a vital force multiplier ensuring that the Coast Guard is *Semper Paratus*-Always Ready.

Sources: USCG.mil, CGAux.org



Photograph by USCG.mil



Photograph by Auxiliarist
Paul Whitman

East District Northern-Region United States Coast Guard Auxiliary Commercial Fishing Vessel Safety Examiner Program

Article by Timothy Hyde

Commercial fishing is one of the most dangerous jobs in the United States. Working on fishing vessels at sea can bring many risks. Weather conditions, such as storms and high winds, can create life-threatening situations. The unpredictable nature of the sea can catch even the most experienced crew off guard. Also, commercial fishing often requires operations in areas far from immediate medical assistance, complicating emergency responses when accidents occur. Given these risks, safety measures are essential. Implementing rigorous safety protocols, ensuring proper training for all crew members and equipping vessels with life-saving equipment can reduce the likelihood of fatalities and injuries. Awareness and preparedness help protect the lives of those who work in commercial fishing.

The Commercial Fishing Industry Vessel Safety Act of 1988 gave the USCG authority to develop lifesaving regulations for Commercial Fishing Vessels. These standards were codified in the United States Code (USC) Title 46, Chapter 45 and 28. Coast Guard Authorization Act 2010 and 2012 mandated dockside Safety Exams for all Commercial Fishing Vessels (CFV's) operating beyond 3 NM from the coast line. In the regulations, commercial fishing industry vessel means a fishing vessel, fish tender vessel, or a fish processing vessel. Each type of vessel is further defined in the law and regulations. It also included a safety exam at least once every 2 or 5 years, depending on vessel status. At least once every 2 years if subject to NOAA observer program. Upon successful safety exam completion, a USCG Safety Decal would be issued and valid for 2 years. The goal of the fishing vessel safety program is to achieve a significant reduction in Commercial Fishing Industry fatalities and vessel losses through public awareness, and voluntary dockside examinations.

Vessels without having completed a mandatory exam within the last 5 years, if boarded, can expect to get a warning and must contact a fishing vessel examiner within 30 days to schedule a mandatory exam. Subsequent boardings of vessels found not to be in compliance with applicable laws, rules, and regulations may be subject to fines, enforcement, and control actions. Vessels with a valid decal can expect to see abbreviated boarding times if issued in the last two years. Those vessels with decals that have expired (but are within the last 5 years) can expect boarding officers to conduct a more extensive examination of the vessels required safety equipment.

Voluntary dockside safety examinations are encouraged for all commercial fishing vessels. These free examinations include a thorough check of safety equipment required on the vessel. The examination can be conducted by qualified Coast Guard personnel or USCG Auxiliary qualified examiners.



East District-Northern Region United States Coast Guard Auxiliary Commercial Fishing Vessel Safety Examiner Program Continued



The big 8 critical gear or systems on a CFV include; Visual distress signals, Personal flotation devices (PFDs), Ring lifebuoys, Survival craft, Survival craft equipment, Survival craft stowage, Emergency Position-Indicating Radio Beacon (EPIRB), and Fire extinguishers. Many other items are checked such as documents, placards, navigation equipment, and communication equipment.

The Commercial Fishing Vessel Safety Examiner (CFVSE) program in East District-Northern Region is

managed by (2) USCG CIV coordinators. Examinations are conducted Dockside year-round. There are typically at least 2 or more qualified examiners for each vessel. Most examinations are conducted in Cape May, Barnegat Light, Atlantic City and Point Pleasant. This is a chance to become a true force multiplier and work side-by-side with the Coast Guard and other Auxiliarists.

After the exam is conducted and if the vessel passed all the requirements, a decal is issued and is valid for 2 years. The exam result is then entered into MISLE (Marine Information for Safety and Law Enforcement) database by Coast Guard personnel MISLE is used to store data on marine accidents, pollution incidents, search and rescue cases, law enforcement activities, and vessel inspections/examinations.

The qualification for Auxiliary members is exactly the same as for active duty and reserve personnel. To receive the competency code CFVSE, USCG Auxiliarists must complete the Commercial Fishing Vessel Examiner Performance and Qualification Standard (PQS). The PQS workbook is the "On the Job Training" (OJT) performance checklist for certification. The PQS workbook contains the necessary tasks and steps to conduct a fishing vessel safety examination. In order to help qualify the examiner, mentors are used to help them through the qualification and tasks. Mentors can be Coast Guard or Auxiliary members that are qualified to sign off Performance Qualification Standards (PQS). All steps and tasks within the PQS workbook must be completed prior to the final Oral Board examination. Upon satisfactory completion of the board, a Letter of Certification/Designation will be issued. It is recommended that the entire process take no longer than 1 year including passing the oral board. To maintain CFVSE currency, examiners are expected to meet minimum yearly activity and training classes.

The mission of the CFVSE program is to promote safety for the fishing vessels and crew. In almost every circumstance, captains and crew of the vessels are very helpful and understand the importance of the CFVSE Program and they show you the location of the different safety items There is no penalty for not passing a voluntary exam and a list will be provided to the owner/operator identifying items that need to be corrected.

United States Coast Guard Auxiliary East District-Northern Region Commercial Fishing Vessel Safety Examiner Program

Continued

I am proud to be part of the USCG Auxiliary East District-Northern Region CFVSE team. The team is dedicated to serve and work side-by-side with the USCG Sector Delaware Bay.

Timothy Hyde

United States Coast Guard Auxiliary
East District-Northern Region
Commercial Fishing Vessel Safety Examiner



Coast Guard Auxiliary Flag Circumnavigates the Globe

By Tim Marks, DSO-PB

Since joining the Coast Guard Auxiliary in 2003, Commodore Joseph “Joe” Giannattasio (East District-Northern Region) has participated in a wide range of Auxiliary missions. Beyond his service, he has a knack for exploration and adventure. Over the years, he has combined these interests through a series of notable Flag Expeditions that have carried the Coast Guard Auxiliary ensign to some of the most remote and significant locations on Earth.

In 2023, Giannattasio completed a two-year journey to transport an Auxiliary flag—either personally or with the assistance of others—to the geographic center of the United States and to the nation's most distant points in each cardinal direction: north, south, east, and west. Later that same year, he embarked on another quest, taking an Auxiliary flag to some of the world's most extreme locations. These included the intersection of the Equator and the International Date Line, the pristine wilderness of Antarctica, the icy reaches of the Arctic Circle, and the historic Prime Meridian in Greenwich, England.

When he learned that his good friends, Mal and Dottie, were preparing for a five-month voyage across multiple continents and around the globe, Giannattasio immediately saw another opportunity for adventure. He entrusted them with a special mission: to carry a Coast Guard Auxiliary ensign on what would become its first documented circumnavigation of the world.

On January 19, 2026, the ocean liner Queen Mary 2 departed New York City with Mal and Dottie aboard—and with a Coast Guard Auxiliary flag beginning an extraordinary global journey. Over 127 days, the flag traveled more than 36,000 miles and visited over 21 ports of call. The itinerary included destinations in Panama, Mexico, Tahiti, Australia, Asia, Mauritius, Namibia, Senegal, England, and France.



Mo'orea Island, French Polynesia.
About 15 miles from Tahiti. Photo
courtesy of the Coast Guard Auxiliary.



Maori village near Tauranga, New Zealand.

Photo courtesy of the Coast Guard Auxiliary.

At many stops along the way, including New Zealand, Indonesia, South Africa, and Spain, the couple shared the story of the United States Coast Guard and the Coast Guard Auxiliary with locals. They often photographed people proudly holding the Auxiliary flag, helping to promote awareness of the organization and its mission around the world.

Since the Coast Guard Auxiliary was established in 1939, its distinctive ensign has symbolized the service, dedication, and commitment of Auxiliarists nationwide. As the flag completed its journey and returned home, it carried with it a story of exploration, international friendship, and service.

Coast Guard Auxiliary Flag Circumnavigates the Globe

Continued

Throughout its voyage, the Coast Guard Auxiliary flag served as a powerful symbol of the organization's enduring mission and its steadfast support of the United States Coast Guard. The journey also highlighted the dedication and volunteer spirit of Auxiliary members, whose contributions help make the Coast Guard Auxiliary one of the world's most respected maritime volunteer organizations.

With more than 36,400 miles traveled around the globe, this ensign is among the most well-traveled Coast Guard Auxiliary flags to date. As Commodore Giannattasio continues to seek new adventures and opportunities for exploration, one question remains: where will this globetrotting little flag travel next?

The itinerary of the voyage was as follows:

- Departed - New York. Monday, January 19, 2026
- Panama Canal. Sunday January 25, 2026
- Manzanillo, Mexico. Friday, January 30, 2026
- Los Angeles. Monday, February 2, 2026
- San Francisco. Thursday, February 5, 2026
- Honolulu, Hawaii. Wednesday, February 11, 2026
- Pape'ete, Tahiti. Wednesday, February 18, 2026
- International Date Line. Thursday, February 19, 2026
- Mo'orea, French Polynesia. Thursday, February 19, 2026
- New Zealand. Thursday, February 26, 2026
- Sydney, Australia. Thursday, March 6, 2026
- Bitung, Indonesia. Tuesday, March 17
- Hong Kong, China. Saturday, March 21
- Chan My, Hue, Viet Nam. Tuesday, March 24
- Singapore. Friday, March 27
- Port Kelang, Malaysia. Sunday, March 29
- Port Louis, Mauritius. Sunday, April 5
- Durban, South Africa. Thursday, April 9
- Walvis Bay, Namibia. Wednesday, April 15
- Dakar, Senegal. Wednesday, April 22
- Tenerife, Spain. Saturday, April 25
- Winchester, England. Thursday, April 30
- Deauville (La Havre), France. Friday, May 1
- Arrived - New York. May 8, 2026.



Captain Andrew Hall, Master of the Queen Mary 2.
Photo courtesy of the Coast Guard Auxiliary.

Port Louis, Mauritius.

Photo courtesy of the Coast Guard Auxiliary.



Auxiliary Cape May Flotilla's Memorial Day Tradition Performed Rain or Shine

by Joseph Giannattasio

CAPE MAY, NJ – In Cape May, New Jersey, a cherished Coast Guard Auxiliary Memorial Day tradition, the Flower Boat Ceremony, was held to honor the memory of military service members who made the ultimate sacrifice for our freedom.

Usually, during Memorial Day ceremonies held on Cape May Beach, a Coast Guard boat gracefully tows the small vessel, adorned with fresh flowers, out to sea, symbolizing the profound gratitude we hold for those who served and died. However, due to unfavorable weather, the boat could not be launched. But the Cape May flotilla members proved adaptable and flexible, trailering the Flower Boat onto the promenade in front of the city's convention hall, where residents and vacationers could still honor the memory of military service members who made the ultimate sacrifice for our freedom.

This local custom has been faithfully conducted by the Cape May flotilla for 82 years without fail. Memorial Day was originally known as Decoration Day, named for the tradition of honoring fallen soldiers by decorating their graves with flowers, flags, and wreaths. Established after the Civil War to commemorate those who died in service, the holiday later became officially recognized as Memorial Day, though the practice of decorating graves remains an important tradition today.

The Flower Boat Ceremony connects modern Memorial Day to its origins as Decoration Day by preserving the solemn act of remembrance and keeping the sacrifice of fallen service members at the heart of the holiday.



Health Services: Force Multipliers within the Coast Guard Auxiliary

Leon C. DeFulgentis, AuxPA1

The United States Coast Guard Auxiliary is widely known for its focus on recreational boating safety and education, providing trained crews to augment and support the Coast Guard, and supporting Coast Guard operational and logistical requirements. However, one of the most specialized and critical components operates largely behind the scenes: Health Services. This program leverages the professional expertise of civilian medical volunteers to ensure that Coast Guard personnel who protect our coasts remain fit for duty.

The active-duty Coast Guard is the smallest of the armed services, and its medical resources are often stretched thin across the country. Auxiliary Health Care Professionals (HCPs) step into this gap, providing thousands of hours of volunteer service that would otherwise cost the government a significant amount in labor. There are currently fifty-one credentialed Auxiliary medical professionals across the United States. I visited the Samuel J. Call Health Services Center (SJCHSC) at Training Center Cape May (TCCM) in Cape May, NJ. The SJCHSC is the largest healthcare facility in the Coast Guard and provides health services across a wide spectrum of care, including primary care, dental, mental health, pharmacy, physical therapy/sports medicine, radiology, laboratory, and optometry. This facility includes a twenty-one patient care unit for recruits with mild to moderate illnesses requiring overnight treatment. Staff at this facility oversee over 35,000 appointments and fill over 24,000 prescriptions annually.

I recently met four dedicated Auxiliarists that volunteer their time and expertise at the SJCHSC. Auxiliarist Frank Rodiño and Auxiliarist John Salvia serve as Physician Assistants, Auxiliarist Robin Ainsworth serves as a dental officer with the Commissioned Corps of the U.S. Public Health Service (USPHS) and is also an Auxiliarist from Southeast District, Flotilla 11-10, Dunedin, FL. Due to the shortage of dental officers at TCCM,



Left to Right: Auxiliarist Rodiño, PA; Auxiliarist Salvia, PA; Auxiliarist CAPT Ainsworth, DDS



Left to Right: Auxiliarist Salvia, PA; Auxiliarist Rodiño, PA; CDR Dr. Amores

Health Services: Force Multipliers within the Coast Guard Auxiliary

Continued

CAPT Ainsworth recently returned to active duty specifically to serve at SJCHSC. Commander Dr. Edward Amores currently serves as the senior medical executive of SJCHSC. In addition to being active duty, CDR Dr. Amores is also an Auxiliarist from Flotilla 10-20 at Air Station Caldwell. CDR Dr. Amores is a helicopter pilot who previously served at Air Station Brooklyn and attended Columbia Medical School. CDR Dr. Amores also serves as a Commissioned Officer with the USPHS.

These volunteers are highly qualified professionals that assist active-duty medical and dental officers and provide essential support in several key areas:

- **Clinical Support:** Auxiliarists assist in USCG clinics, performing routine exams, immunizations, and wellness screenings. This allows active-duty providers to focus their attention on more complex cases and deployment readiness.
- **Aviation Medicine:** Auxiliary flight surgeons work with Coast Guard air stations to ensure pilots and crew members meet rigorous medical standards required for flight status.
- **Training & Education:** Many members serve as instructors, teaching CPR and First Aid. Aiding in training for other Auxiliary members.
- **Deployment Readiness:** Auxiliary medical personnel provide the surge capacity needed during large-scale mobilizations (process hundreds of personnel quickly) or environmental disasters.

Those interested in joining health services must undergo a rigorous credentialing process. The Coast Guard's Chief of Health Services must verify the licenses, certifications, and clinical backgrounds of every volunteer. Once cleared, these members wear the Coast Guard Auxiliary uniform with specific healthcare insignia, signifying their role as trusted components of the Coast Guard's medical readiness team. According to CDR Dr. Amores, "Each Auxiliarist gives the most valuable asset to Coast Guard Health Services which is their skill and time. Every hour they volunteer is invaluable and each Auxiliarist truly acts as a force multiplier for the Coast Guard Health Services program." The Coast Guard Auxiliary Health Services program represents the best of civic-minded professionalism. By volunteering their high-value skills, these medical professionals ensure that the men and women of the U.S. Coast Guard are healthy, prepared, capable of performing their life-saving missions, and *Semper Paratus-Always Ready*.

Sources:

CGAux.org, USCG.mil, COMDTINST M6010.2 (series).

Left to Right: Auxiliarist Rodiño, PA; Auxiliarist; CAPT Ainsworth, DDS; Auxiliarist Salvia, PA



National Auxiliary Commodores Memorial Unveiled at TRACEN

Article by COMO Joseph Giannattasio

In May, a new memorial sponsored by the Auxiliary National Association of Commodores (NAC) was installed at U.S. Coast Guard Training Center Cape May (TRACEN). This living tribute honors deceased Commodores of the United States Coast Guard Auxiliary whose names are engraved in stone in recognition of their dedication to leadership and public service.

The memorial is the first national monument within the Coast Guard Auxiliary cre-ated specifically to commemorate past Commodores who have “crossed the bar,” a traditional nautical phrase signifying the pass-ing of a mariner. Designed with space to add future names, the memorial will continue to honor generations of Auxiliary leaders for years to come.

Located prominently on the base, the monument is visible to all visitors. Its inscription reads: “Dedicated to our deceased Commodores, men and women of the U.S. Coast Guard Auxiliary who have crossed the bar.” The message serves as a meaningful tribute to the service, professionalism, leadership, and dedication of Auxiliary Commodores who have passed away since 2005.



The newly installed NAC Monument stones (left) and the Auxiliary Memorial (right) at TRACEN Cape May.

Coast Guard Auxiliary photo by Joseph Giannattasio



Attendees from across the nation gather before the National Association of Commodores memorial.

Coast Guard Auxiliary photo by Joseph Giannattasio

National Auxiliary Commodores Memorial Unveiled at TRACEN

Continued

Adjacent to the NAC memorial stands another monument honoring the Coast Guard Auxiliary as a whole. Dedicated in 2002 by Vice Admiral Sally Brice-O'Hara, it recognizes the thousands of volunteers who support Coast Guard operations and missions each day.

A formal dedication ceremony for the NAC memorial was held at Training Center Cape May on May 13, 2026. Attendees included Captain Amanda Lee, Commanding Officer of Training Center Cape May; Captain Brent Schmadeke, Chief of the Office of Auxiliary and Boating Safety (CG-BSX); National Commodore Mary Kirkwood; Auxiliarists; active-duty personnel; family members; and friends from across the country.

The memorial now stands as a lasting tribute to the men and women whose leadership and commitment helped shape and strengthen the Coast Guard Auxiliary through decades of dedicated service.



Ralph Atwell provided mobile tours of TRACEN for attendees.

Coast Guard Auxiliary photo by Joseph Giannattasio



Attendees from throughout the nation were treated to celebratory refreshments by local AUXCAs.

Coast Guard Auxiliary photo by Joseph Giannattasio

National Auxiliary Commodores Memorial unveiled at TRACEN

Continued



Captain Amanda Lee, Commanding Officer of Training Center Cape May.

Coast Guard Auxiliary photo by Joseph Giannattasio

Captain Brent Schmadeke, Chief of the Office of Auxiliary and Boating Safety (CG-BSX).

Coast Guard Auxiliary photo by Joseph Giannattasio



National Commodore Mary Kirkwood of the Coast Guard Auxiliary;
Coast Guard Auxiliary photo by Joseph Giannattasio

National Auxiliary Commodores Memorial unveiled at TRACEN

Continued



Ribbon-Cutting Ceremony for the NAC Monument.

Coast Guard Auxiliary photo by Joseph Giannattasio

Recognition of members whose efforts have brought the National Monument to completion.

Coast Guard Auxiliary photo by Sandra Dalton



History of the District and Auxiliary



Saving East District-Northern Region History

By Tim Marks, DSO-PB

Steve Marthouse, our District Historian, he thought it would be interesting and more valuable to you, the members, if he would have your input as to what you might like him to write about, cover, or explain rather than him trying to write something that he thinks you would be interested in.

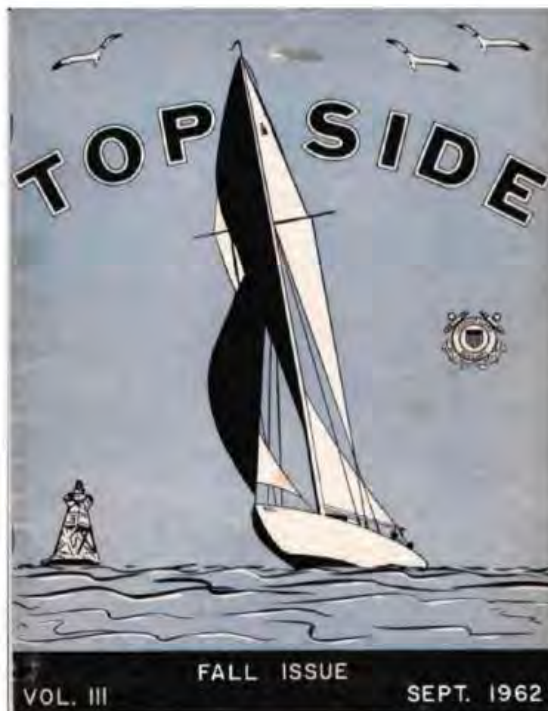
The idea is that Steve would create a column in each newsletter such as "Ask the Auxiliary Historian" or "Ever wonder why the Auxiliary _____?"

The Coast Guard Auxiliary and the District have a long and storied history, with the Coast Guard having a history as old as the country. Is there something you were wondering about? Is there a topic you wanted to learn more about? Is there a piece of Coast Guard or Auxiliary history that you wish you knew more about? Feel free to ask your questions directly to Historian Marthouse. He will then address them in future issues of *Topside*. **Email: sjmarthouse@gmail.com**



*Steve Marthouse
CGD-E-NR Historian
ADSO-PB History*

Our Front Pages Through The Years



We've been covering the happenings around the East District-Northern Region and the entire Coast Guard Auxiliary since 1943.

We are proud to introduce our newsletter's online archive for all Auxiliarists, Active Duty personnel, and the public at large to enjoy on the district website at <https://5nr.org/topside-archives/>.

TOPSIDE is the official newsletter of U.S. Coast Guard Auxiliary East District - Northern Region. Launched in March 1943, it is the oldest continuously published Auxiliary newsletter in the United States. The TOPSIDE online bibliotheca contains the most complete collection of TOPSIDE issues from March 1943 to the present.

The Coast Guard Rescue of the SS Pendleton: Courage in the Face of Impossible Odds

by COMO Noreen Schifini

On February 18, 1952, one of the greatest small-boat rescues in maritime history unfolded off the coast of Cape Cod, Massachusetts. During a fierce winter nor'easter, the United States Coast Guard carried out an extraordinary mission that saved 32 sailors from the oil tanker SS Pendleton. Led by Boatswain's Mate First Class Bernard C. Webber, the rescue has become a lasting symbol of courage, teamwork, and dedication to duty.

A Storm of Historic Proportions

The winter storm that struck New England brought hurricane-force winds, freezing temperatures, and waves reaching more than 60 feet. Visibility was nearly nonexistent as snow and sea spray battered ships along the coast.

The SS Pendleton, a T2 oil tanker carrying fuel, was caught in the storm approximately five miles off Chatham, Massachusetts. The tremendous stress of the waves caused the ship to crack in half. The bow section quickly drifted away, while the stern remained afloat with 33 crew members trapped aboard. With the ship's communications destroyed, there was little hope that help would arrive in time.

At nearly the same moment, another tanker, the SS Fort Mercer, also broke apart farther offshore, stretching Coast Guard resources to their limits.

A Mission Many Considered Impossible

At Coast Guard Station Chatham, rescue crews learned that the Pendleton was in desperate trouble. Bernard Webber was ordered to take the station's 36-foot motor lifeboat, CG-36500, into conditions few believed any small boat could survive.

Joining Webber were Engineman Andrew Fitzgerald, Seaman Richard Livesey, and Seaman Ervin Maske. The four-man crew knew the mission could easily become a one-way trip.

As they crossed the infamous Chatham Bar, enormous waves slammed into the lifeboat. A breaking wave destroyed the boat's compass, leaving the crew to navigate through darkness and blinding snow using only their experience and knowledge of local waters.

Finding the Pendleton

Against overwhelming odds, the crew located the stern section of the Pendleton. The tanker pitched violently in the towering seas while the trapped sailors prepared to abandon ship.

The CG-36500 was designed to carry only about a dozen people safely. Yet with the tanker sinking and no other rescue vessel able to reach them in time, Webber made the decision to take as many survivors aboard as possible.

Continued on the next page...

The Coast Guard Rescue of the SS Pendleton:

Courage in the Face of Impossible Odds

Continued

One by one, sailors climbed down rope ladders into the wildly pitching lifeboat. Thirty-two of the thirty-three crew members were successfully rescued. One sailor had been lost before the rescue boat arrived.

With 36 people now aboard a vessel built for far fewer, the overloaded lifeboat began the dangerous return journey.

A Difficult Journey Home

Without a compass and in near-whiteout conditions, the crew relied on instinct, local knowledge, and guidance from shore. Volunteers waiting on the beach used the headlights of their vehicles to illuminate the harbor entrance, helping guide the lifeboat safely through the surf.

When the CG-36500 finally reached Chatham Harbor, the rescue was met with amazement. What had seemed impossible had become one of the most remarkable lifesaving achievements in Coast Guard history.

Recognition and Legacy

For their extraordinary heroism, Bernard Webber, Andrew Fitzgerald, Richard Livesey, and Ervin Maske each received the Coast Guard Gold Lifesaving Medal, one of the service's highest honors.

The rescue demonstrated not only exceptional seamanship but also the Coast Guard's enduring commitment to its motto: "*Semper Paratus*"—Always Ready.

Today, the original CG-36500 has been carefully restored and is preserved at the Orleans Historical Society in Orleans, Massachusetts. It serves as a reminder of the bravery displayed on that winter night and the lives saved through determination and selfless service.

The story reached a wider audience through Michael J. Tougias and Casey Sherman's bestselling book *The Finest Hours*, which was later adapted into a 2016 Disney film of the same name. While the film dramatizes certain events, it captures the extraordinary courage of the rescue crew and introduces their story to new generations.

Conclusion

The rescue of the SS Pendleton remains one of the finest examples of courage and leadership in American maritime history. Faced with towering seas, freezing temperatures, failed navigation equipment, and overwhelming danger, four Coast Guardsmen refused to abandon those in peril. Their successful rescue of 32 sailors stands as a testament to skill, perseverance, and the unwavering commitment to save lives at sea.

More than seventy years later, the events of February 18, 1952, continue to inspire Coast Guard members and civilians alike, reminding us that true heroism is often found in ordinary people who choose to do extraordinary things when others need them most.

From Cork to Synthetics: The Evolution of Lifejackets

Leon C. DeFulgentis, AuxPA1

For as long as humans have ventured onto the water, the risk of drowning has necessitated the development of artificial buoyancy. The history of the personal flotation device (PFD), a.k.a. the lifejacket, was created out of a centuries-long chronicle of trial and error. We have moved from primitive animal bladders to high-tech CO₂-activated gear that is designed to save lives in seconds.

As early as the Assyrian Empire, soldiers and traders utilized inflatable animal skins for flotation (Gosh & Stearns, 2007). Often made from goat or sheepskins, these were made to cross rivers or support rafts. While crude and prone to puncture, they represented a fundamental shift: moving away from the reliance on swimming ability toward the use of buoyant materials. The mid-1800s marked the birth of the lifejacket as a piece of safety equipment. In 1854, Captain John Ross Ward of the Royal National Lifeboat Institution (RNLI) designed a cork lifebelt. Utilizing narrow strips of cork sewn into a canvas vest, this was a revolutionary step forward. The “Ward Vest” was flexible enough to allow a lifeboatman to row while wearing it, providing both protection and mobility (McLean, 2024).

Rigid cork lifejackets remained popular for over fifty years, but in 1904, a new design that contained fibrous vegetable material was introduced.

This material is Kapok, a fibrous, cotton-like material harvested from the ceiba tree. Kapok in waterproof cells is naturally buoyant and much more comfortable than cork.

The main problem with cork is that it remains dangerously rigid; if a wearer fell from a great height, the impact of cork against the chin or neck could cause severe injury or break jaws when jumping from tall ships into the water. Kapok became the standard filling for lifejackets during the era of the RMS Titanic. The Titanic tragedy showed that lifejackets could keep passengers afloat but also highlighted the lethal threat of hypothermia in freezing waters. The 1912 sinking led to the formation of the Safety of Life at Sea (SOLAS) committee, which established the first international standards for life-saving appliances (McLean, 2024). Kapok was quickly replaced by foam as it lost buoyancy when squeezed or when submerged for long periods of time.



Henry Hood, Coxswain of the Seaton Carew Lifeboat, photographed after his retirement, wearing an RNLI cork lifejacket. The photograph clearly illustrates the small blocks of cork, sewn together and held tight against the body with a leather belt.
Copyright: Museum of Hartlepool.



CO₂ inflatable PFD.
Copyright: Mustang Survival.

From Cork to Synthetics: The Evolution of Lifejackets

Continued

During World War II, driven by the needs of airmen and sailors, the Life Preserver, Type B-4 was developed. Also known as the “Mae West,” named after the actress, it was an inflatable vest that utilizes CO₂ canisters for rapid inflation—a vital feature for injured pilots (AG-HFM, n.d.). During this period, groundbreaking research by Macintosh and Pask examined the behavior of unconscious humans in the water. Pask allowed himself to be anesthetized and placed into a pool to test the self-righting capabilities of various designs. This led to improved head-support designs that remain standard today (Brooks, n.d.). By the mid-20th century, closed-cell plastic foam (Polyethylene) is used in lifejackets. This material is durable, rot-proof, and maintains buoyancy if punctured (McLean, 2024).

Today, the U.S. Coast Guard categorizes PFDs into five specific types based on their use:

- Type I: Offshore lifejackets with the greatest buoyancy (over 20 pounds of buoyancy), designed to turn an unconscious person face-up.
- Type II: Near-shore vests for calm waters where quick rescue is likely (minimum 15.5 pounds of buoyancy), designed to turn an unconscious person face-up.
- Type III: Flotation aids common in recreational boating (minimum 15.5 pounds of buoyancy). Not designed to turn an unconscious person face-up, more comfortable for water sports.
- Type IV: Throwable devices like life rings or cushions (minimum of 16.5 pounds of buoyancy), designed to be grasped, not worn.
- Type V: Special-use devices, such as deck suits or hybrid inflatables. Must be used in accordance with any requirements on the approval label.

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The Crew of the Princess Royal (1939-1968) photographed wearing Kapok lifejackets. Copyright: Museum of Hartlepool.

East District- Northern Region Obscura



CGD-E-NR Steam Trains

For many Auxiliarists, riding a steam locomotive is almost as thrilling as sailing on a Coast Guard cutter or boat. The appeal of steam locomotives lies in their vivid, tangible presence—their power, operation, and sounds are all on display. Even those who aren't rail-fans often find themselves drawn to these captivating machines.

In the United States, about 200 steam locomotives are still operational, and our District boasts several fantastic options. In New Jersey, you can explore the Black River & Western Railroad in Flemington or the Delaware River Railroad Excursions in Phillipsburg. Over in Delaware, the Wilmington & Western Railroad offers a memorable experience.

Pennsylvania also has an impressive selection of steam train excursions, including the New Hope Railroad in New Hope, the East Broad Top Railroad in Rockhill, the Everett Railroad Company in Hollidaysburg, and the famous Strasburg Rail Road.

All aboard for a journey into steam-powered history!



Above: Photographs by COMO Joseph Giannattasio, Photo Release (form 7020) on file

TOPSIDE invites you to check out East District - Northern Region Obscura—a community space where members can share cool, unusual, or lesser-known spots around our district.

If you know of a unique place in your area — maybe it's a special scenic spot, an interesting landmark, or a local secret—snap a few photos and send them in with a short description to our Editor. By sharing, you'll help other members discover new places to explore and enjoy on their own adventures!

Photos from Across the District



CAPE MAY, NJ - Coast Guard Auxiliary East District - Northern Region members work alongside active-duty personnel and Coast Guard Academy cadets during a towing training exercise designed to enhance operational skills and proficiency.

Less than 12 months after reporting to the Academy, first-year cadets may find themselves involved in their first Coast Guard mission. That's because cadets train aboard operational Coast Guard units during the summer. Think of it as summer break with a purpose.

Photos by COMO Joseph Giannattasio



Where Farming, Fishing, and Boating Safety Meet

by COMO Joseph Giannattasio

Since Cape May County was first incorporated in 1692, its economy and appeal have been rooted in agriculture and fishing. Although the landscape has changed dramatically over the centuries, people continue to be drawn to the Jersey Cape for its miles of beautiful coastline, acres of farmland and open space, and the unique combination of both that creates a quality of life found nowhere else.

And June's West Cape May weekly farmers' market provided the perfect setting for the local Coast Guard Auxiliary flotilla in Cape May to carry out its Public Affairs mission by promoting boating safety and environmental stewardship.

PHOTO CAPTION:

(Left to Right) Lorraine Bianco, Bob Strauss, Marty Sannino and Lynn Marks manning their flotilla's boating safety booth.



Change of Command: Sector Delaware Bay

Photos by Leon C. DeFulgentis, AuxPA1



Change of Command: Sector Delaware Bay

Continued



Change of Command: Sector Delaware Bay

Continued



Coast Guard Auxiliary Sunsets Hit Different when your Office Floats.

Out here, every horizon tells a story of unwavering dedication and selflessness of our members who strive in making the Coast Guard Auxiliary into the world's most effective and esteemed maritime volunteer force.

Southern New Jersey Auxiliarists in Division 08 enjoy a stunning sunset while conducting tasks to demonstrate proficiency in core competencies like firefighting, dewatering pumps, and towing.

As the sun sets over the water, it reflects not only the beauty of the sea, but the enduring devotion of those who choose to serve.

Photograph by COMO Joseph Giannattasio



"Payday" at Cape May Flotilla

Text and photos by COMO Joseph Giannattasio

Flotilla Cape May's July business meeting was "payday" for deserving members of the unit. Robert Bredehoft, Flotilla Commander, took delight in presenting various awards and citations to five members who distinguished themselves in service to the Auxiliary and Coast Guard.

Members of the Coast Guard Auxiliary are unpaid volunteers who receive no financial compensation for their service. As a result, flotilla and division leaders traditionally refer to award presentation events as "paydays," where the "pay" comes in the form of awards, ribbons, and certificates recognizing members' dedication and accomplishments.





Reading, PA. Aux Robin Rosenberg escorted the U.S. Coast Guard Auxiliary mascot, Sammy the Sea Otter, (Lisa Ann Zarzecki) on Memorial Day.

Sammy greeted children and adults as they entered the Antietam Public pool in Reading, PA. As you can see, Sammy is wearing his PFD to promote safe boating.

Robin handed out Sammy the Sea Otter coloring books. Included in each coloring book was a note explaining how the Auxiliary is the uniformed, civilian volunteer component of the U.S. Coast Guard. Also included were flyers on how to join the auxiliary.

Photographs by Aux Robin Rosenberg





Joe Coastie Visits Division 8's May Meeting.

Article and photo by COMO Joe Giannattasio

Members of South Jersey's Division 08 enjoyed a surprise visit from Joe Coastie. Joe Coastie is a popular costumed mascot used by the U.S. Coast Guard and U.S. Coast Guard Auxiliary at public events, festivals, and parades. He generally appears as a friendly, smiling Coast Guardsman in an oversized uniform to help engage the community and promote Coast Guard awareness.

Headed by Public Affairs 'gurus' Dave Hartman and Nick Russo, the division has been at the forefront of utilizing official mascots over the years at numerous public affairs events throughout New Jersey.

Several years ago, Nick assembled a team of shipmates to successfully resurrect a Coastie Robot and its trailer, which had been dormant for several years.

These mascots aren't just adorable faces—they are lifesavers that help teach boating safety, especially to children, through interactive education and fun demonstrations. Whether reminding boaters to wear life jackets, stay alert on the water, or follow safe boating practices, these "Coasties" are always ready to spread the word.



Cape May Auxiliaries Get Underway for the 2026 Patrol Season.

On Sunday, June 7, 2026, Flotilla Cape May boat crew members performed a Safety Zone patrol with Coast Guard small-boat assets from USCG Station Cape May for the 13th Annual Escape the Cape Triathlon, the ONLY triathlon on the East Coast with a Boat Jump Start!

Beginning with a thrilling leap off the Cape May-Lewes Ferry, participants in the sprint-distance Escape the Cape Triathlon jump into the Delaware Bay for a 0.35-mile swim, followed by a flat and fast 12-mile bike ride through coastal roads and a 5K run with stunning waterfront views.

Known for its adrenaline-pumping start, participants enjoy unique finisher medals, lively festivities, and the seaside charm of the Cape May area.

Coast Guard Auxiliary photos by Joseph Giannattasio

Celebrating 83 Years!

Just a reminder that our research indicates that this newsletter, TOPSIDE, is the oldest continuously published Auxiliary newsletter. TOPSIDE has been regularly published since March 1943.

To view TOPSIDE's online archive, please click this link on the District website at <https://5nr.org/topside-archives/>. The TOPSIDE online bibliotheca contains the most complete collection of TOPSIDE from March 1943 to present.

We assembled a dedicated multi-disciplined team of CGD-E-NR members to insure the preservation of the collection of old TOPSIDE newsletters. The Team digitally scanned each issue and uploaded them onto a section in the district's website where they could be stored and accessed.

TOPSIDE's online archive reveals a wealth of treasure from the Auxiliary's history. Gems include a 1944 article chronicling the Auxiliary's response to the "Great Atlantic Hurricane" of September that year, the golden 50-year anniversary fall 1989 issue featuring the "History, 5th [Northern Region] Coast Guard Auxiliary," and policy pieces including the 2003 essay about the Auxiliary being the only volunteer organization to be included in the newly created Department of Homeland Security.

Please view this archive, continue reading current issues of TOPSIDE, and thank you for all your support to this newsletter for the past 83 years!



A Message from the Editor

Good day East-Northern,

I hope you are doing well. This month the departments in the Prevention Directorate as well as the Central Divisions were featured. The next issue will feature the Western Division and Response Directorate.

As boating season wraps up, keep in mind contributing to this publication and sending pictures, articles, etc. my way. I am very much appreciative of all who have supported *Topside* in the past. Thank you.



Semper Paratus,
Tim Marks
DSO-PB



Timothy Marks
District Staff Officer -
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Come Visit us on the Web

Coast Guard Auxiliary homepage:

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<http://www.5nr.org/index.php>



Parting Shots



In July, Coast Guard Auxiliary District East Northern's aviation crews flew with Coast Guard Station Cape May personnel and flew over parts of New Jersey to help the Coast Guard Small Boat Stations understand what conditions look like along the waterways. During these flights, they check inlets and the Intracoastal Waterway (ICW) to spot and photograph problems like shallow areas (shoaling) and other navigation hazards.

These flights originated in 2012 and are designed to improve the Coast Guard's awareness of what's happening on the water. They also help the Coast Guard's surface units get a clearer picture of local conditions—especially after winter, major storms, and other changes. The missions can even include information that supports marine mammal observations.

The photos collected during these overflights are especially useful to small-boat crews. By showing where shoaling is happening and pointing out safer routes through certain areas, the pictures can help prevent boats from running aground. This is a great example of how the Coast Guard and the Coast Guard Auxiliary work together to meet shared goals.

Auxiliary aviators also benefit from the mission data. The information gathered helps guide future training and air program needs by improving pilot familiarity with the region, showing what different aircraft can do, and helping aircrews practice and build new skills.

In short, this is a clear case where “pictures are worth a thousand words” really does apply.

Coast Guard Auxiliary photo by Joseph Giannattasio