

## **AUX INSTRUCTORS HELPS FORM NEW COAST GUARD OFFICERS**

For the past 15 years, Coast Guard Auxiliary members from District 1 South have taken an important role in helping the service prepare its newest officer candidates for active duty assignments.

Several times each year, Auxiliary instructors from the New England area visited the U.S. Coast Guard Academy in New London, Conn. to make special 90-minute presentations on “Coast Guard Auxiliary – Proud Traditions, Worthy Missions” to officer candidates, direct commissioned and NOAA officers, reserve officer candidate indoctrination personnel, and international representatives from other Coast Guards attending Officer Candidate School (OCS) programs at the Academy.

The Auxiliary presentation comprised 35 screens of information regarding the Auxiliary, its purposes and its capabilities, along with a question and answer period that educates the future officers on the Auxiliary’s mission and function as a member of the Coast Guard team.

“The presentation was updated, formatted, and adjusted from time to time but the instructors’ mission remained the same,” says instructor David J. Obedzinski, FSO-PV, East Hartford (CT) Flotilla, “and that is to provide an accurate picture of the Auxiliary organization, our mission, how we work to augment the Coast Guard, and how, if officers and enlisted personnel are aware of the value we bring, we can help them be successful in their missions. Basically, we established a base line of knowledge about the Auxiliary where often one did not exist before.”

The Auxiliary’s input was well received by the Officer Candidate School’s instructors: “It is important for our new officers regardless of commissioning source to understand all facets of the Coast Guard including our civilian, reserve and Auxiliary members,” said Commander Amy E. Florentino, USCG, former chief of OCS. “It is especially helpful to have Auxiliarists deliver the material. For many students you also provide a first engagement and it paves the way for a positive working relationship in the field. This personal interaction brings the material to life for the students and definitely highlights what a force multiplier the Auxiliary is within our service.”

“When I finish one of these briefings I will always have several officer candidates approach me,” Obedzinski says, “and share with me statements such as, ‘I never knew what you guys did but I have got to connect with the Auxiliary when I get to my next station.’ Or maybe I’ll hear, ‘I didn’t know the Auxiliary handled that’ or ‘I’ve had the opportunity to work with Auxiliarists in the field and they are great. I’m so glad you’re sharing this with more of us.’”

“One of the main points I make to them as a takeaway is to take advantage of the energy, experience and expertise your local Auxiliarists have,” Obedzinski added. “They know the weather patterns; they know the tides and how often bad weather hits and with what kind of intensity. They often know the recreational and fishing fleets and how they operate in your area of responsibility. I remind them to take advantage of that knowledge so, at the least, they can make more informed decisions about how to respond where needed.”

The tradition of making this presentation to OCS started some 15 years ago when local Auxiliarists Bill Huling, George White and Steve Messelt established, refined, and then taught the briefing over a period of time. Other Auxiliarists, including William Bowen and Bruce Buckley from Division 25 also assisted from time to time and when no Auxiliary instructor was unavailable, an officer in OCS would make the presentation. “By 2015,” Obedzinski said, “I was working at the Academy as a vice president for the Academy’s Alumni Association, a position I held for seven years. I had become active in the Auxiliary and wanted to become an instructor. Bruce Buckley became my mentor and seeing the opportunity to plug me into this briefing assignment, with my work location being a short walk across the base, it wasn’t long before I was named Lead Instructor for this ongoing mission.

“Honestly, I love it,” Obedzinski is quick to add. “And even though my commute today for the briefing, from central Connecticut in my current position as president of a community foundation, is a bit longer, I enjoy knowing that I’m continuing an important tradition started by those before me. The officer candidates enjoy it, the interactions in class where I ask them to share with others present what interactions they’ve had with

Auxiliarists are wonderful for all of us and the OCS staff have expressed, regardless of rotating staff, that there is real value to this 90-minute interaction.”

“When I began instructing, we were presenting the material only to enlisted personnel going through OCS,” Obedzinski recalled. “In 2016, the staff of OCS approached me about also presenting this slide deck to those direct commissioned, reserve officer candidate indoctrination, NOAA and international representatives because they saw the value of more officers understanding the Auxiliary’s role and how Coast Guard personnel could work effectively with the volunteers of the service. We added their sections to our itinerary immediately and doubled the number of times we presented the materials.

“We now visit the academy at least three time annually,” Obedzinski said, “often conducting back to back sessions. Since August of 2016, ‘Proud Tradition, Worthy Missions’ has been part of the OCS curriculum for approximately 860 new officers in the Coast Guard. I

What is in the future for this program? “Initial discussions with the Academy for a possible annual presentation to the graduating cadets have taken place,” Obedzinski said, “and it is our hope we can make this occur in the near future so that all graduating officers will then all have the same briefing before their next billet.

“Each class, led by myself or our new instructor Sean Peoples, has its own personality as I’m sure the OCS staff will attest ,” Obedzinski laughed. “Some are more talkative and have plenty of questions or Auxiliary interactions to share. Others are more reserved. In one case, upon learning from the briefing that Auxiliarists pay for all of their own uniforms and most of their equipment the class took it upon themselves, without our knowledge, to organize a uniform collection from the class and donated two large bags of gently used, cleaned and folded uniforms, boots, shoes and accessories for our Division’s Auxiliarists to have as a token of their appreciation for what we do. We’re distributing those uniforms now, especially to new members. In another case I had a wonderful conversation with a lieutenant from South Korea who explained that they don’t have anything like an Auxiliary in his country but he wanted to learn all about it so he could share the information with his service back home.

“Our reach is far indeed,” Obedzinski noted.

“I’m grateful for the ongoing mission to share this information with those who can put it into practice in the field and work even more effectively with our volunteer service, Obedzinski said. “We’re giving our officers a baseline of information about who we are, what we do, how we can contribute and work together to accomplish the mission.

“With that knowledge, we will be *Semper Paratus*.”



Giving the briefing to the larger OCS class of officer candidates in an auditorium at the U.S. Coast Guard Academy



David Obedzinski giving the Auxiliary briefing at the U.S. Coast Guard Academy's Leadership Development Center to a class of direct commissioned officers



AUX Instructor Sean Peoples, Officer Candidate Sophia Rubino, and AUX Instructor David Obedzinski following the briefing made to OCS 1-20 Class in October 2019. Rubino is an Auxiliarist and Air Observer from San Diego where she has been active in the Auxiliary for five years prior to enlisting. She will attend flight school following her commissioning.



AUX Instructor David Obedzinski stands among the officer candidates of OCS Class 1-20 in October 2019 following their receiving the Auxiliary briefing at the U.S. Coast Guard Academy.