

U.S. Department of
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**United States
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Auxiliary**



Charlie Noble

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Quarterly Newsletter of Division 15, District 7

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Coxswains Ray O'Connell (standing L) and Mike Fitzgerald (far R) assist with side tow practice for Chet Bowman (center L) and Bruce Ristich (center R)
Photo by Chuck Dolan

Division 15 Bridge

Division Commander	Division Vice Commander	Immediate Past Division Commander
Diane Berman dhberman@uscgaux-fl.org	Andrew Render andy.render@uscgaux-fl.org	Paul Pelletier paul.pelletier@uscgaux-fl.org

2016 Division 15 Flotilla Bridge Officers

15-1

Linda Jones, FC
Ralph Altavilla, VFC

15-4

Robert Currie, FC
D. Rusty Hays, VFC

15-2

Leslie Moore, FC
John Caddigan, VFC

15-7

Josef Weiss, FC
Donald Sorli, Sr., VFC

15-3

Mary Patton, FC
Randy Patton, VFC

15-8

James Nastelli, FC
Bruce Ristich, VFC

January Division Meeting Notes

The meeting opened with the Pledge of Allegiance and a moment of silence. Diane Berman, DCDR, welcomed the Executive Petty Officer (XPO) from Station Yankeetown, BM1 Michael Shallue, USCG. In her opening remarks, Ms Berman said 2016 is a rebuilding year. She explained that Flotilla 15-5, Gainesville, disestablished itself due to lack of members stepping up to take leadership roles. Ms Berman also told the meeting that Division 15 has lost almost 25% of its members due to the dues increase, mandated training, and retirements. She thanked all members of the division for helping the division win the 2014 Commodore's Cup for the most improved division. The award was presented to Diane at D-TRAIN in September.

BM1 Shallue reported that Chief Whitmore, OIC at Station Yankeetown, will likely be promoted to Chief Warrant Officer soon, and that he will be transitioning to another position, probably in May. Mr. Shallue thanked the Auxiliary for their Holiday Ethnic Luncheon, and said, "It was awesome."

Andy Render, VCDR, in his opening remarks, stated that CAPT Gregory Case, USCG, Commander of Sector St. Petersburg, will be transferring in the spring. He also said the Mr. O'Hara, the Sector AUXLO,

will be moving on and will be replaced in October. Mr. Render talked about the upcoming SO/FSO meeting on 23 January and said he would be talking about recent Auxiliary mishaps on the water. He reported that there will be a new Sector Auxiliary Security Team appointed and the members will get specialized security training so the team can assist Sector with security at various events. Andy said that flotillas will need to appoint a Rescue & Survival (R&S) officer. Larry Berman, DDC-P and SO-IS, will be the R&S officer for the division. Personal Protection Equipment (PPE) has to meet Coast Guard standards now. Mr. Render said Station Yankeetown has offered their meeting rooms for Auxiliary training and/or meetings, and he announced that the "ride-along program" with active duty personnel is starting up again. Members who wish to ride along on Coast Guard patrols should contact their FSO-OP to express their interest. The program is available on Tuesdays and Thursdays.

Michael Moore, SO-PA, and Ralph Altavilla, SO-PV, were sworn in as new division staff officers by the DCDR and VCDR. Minutes from the October meeting were approved and the financial report was given by Don

Jones, SO-FN.

It was announced that the division will have the 4-hour TCT training on Sunday, 10 April, at 15-1's building in Crystal River. Training will start at 0900. The annual SO-FSO meeting will take place on Saturday, 23 January. All SOs and FSOs are asked to attend. FSOs will break out and meet with their SO for training and to answer FSO questions. The uniform of the day will be civilian casual—so, be comfortable.

Flotilla Disaster/Hurricane plans should be forwarded to the VCDR and copied to the DCDR, by the end of March. Discussion was held on obtaining storage for the division's equipment, most of which is currently stored at the Berman's home. A committee was formed to investigate methods and costs of storage. Andy Render, as the SO-OP, is the chair, with members Ralph Altavilla, Michael Moore, Rusty Hays and two members from 15-8. The annual report by FCs is due by the end of February. The meeting was adjourned at 1120 hours.



Division Commander's Report

by Diane Berman, DCDR



This is a year of rebuilding for Division 15. We've faced a number of challenges in the past year including the loss of a flotilla and the loss of almost one-quarter of our membership. Issues that contributed to the losses in 2015 included, but were not limited to, Mandated Training and the increase in National dues.

But that was last year. As we look to the future of Division 15, we see nothing but light. There have been many changes already with new FCs and Division Staff Officers. Andy Render, VCDR, is working hard to get the SOs motivated and working in concert with the FSOs to

build up our numbers and membership.

There have already been changes. Take a look at our new and improved Division website, www.cgainfla.org. Randy Patton, our new SO-CS, has already made major improvements that will help keep everyone in the loop. He will also be aggressive in keeping the information up to date and relevant to the Division. Let Randy know what you would like to see as part of the site.

With the decrease in membership, it's important for everyone to go the

extra mile in keeping our missions up and even increasing our numbers. If everyone does just a few more VEs and a few more PVs, we can do it.

Division 15 was awarded the Commodore's Cup for 2014 for the most improved Division in District 7. Andy and I aim to make 2016 a repeat performance. With your help, we can do it.

Here's to a great 2016 and an even greater Division 15!



Division Vice Commander's Report

by Andy Render, VCDR

Far too often we do not realize the important part that our staff officers play in the success of our flotillas and our division! It is difficult to imagine trying to function if we did not have someone who was there to input the information for the missions we conducted, or there was no one to schedule training classes or no one to publish our newsletters! My hat is off to all of you who have stepped forward and offered your services as a division staff officer.

In order for us to get off to a good start in 2016, we are again conducting our annual SO/FSO meeting at 0900 hours on Saturday 23 January at the West Citrus Community Center in Homosassa.

Diane and I will do a SHORT kick-off for the meeting---- but after that it

is YOUR meeting! We will break into staff position meetings, with each of the sub-meetings coordinated by the division staff officer for your particular specialty. This is an excellent chance for you to get to know each other and discuss the type of support to go "up and down the communication chain."

This will be a very informal meeting, you have the opportunity to map out your plans for the year, learn what the staff position is all about, or simply take the opportunity to trade ideas and suggestions.

Everyone in the division is invited to join in! If you are not a staff officer, but would like to find out more about one of the offices, please join us! This should be a learning experience for everyone.

The best part is that the coffee and donuts are free. Civilian casual is the uniform of the day. I'm looking forward to seeing you on Saturday, 23 January.



Flotilla Commander Reports



15-1 Crystal River by James Simon, Outgoing FC

During the fourth quarter, we provided one Watchstander at Station Yankeetown and have had one member in Watchstander training each week. Our flotilla has provided one AUXFS member to assist with meal preparation for the Station during this quarter. AUXFS member Vince Maida has received orders to serve on the U.S. Coast Guard Cutter *Diligence* in January. Flotilla 15-1 was well-represented at the Coast Guard Ethnic Holiday Luncheon, put on by the Auxiliary at Station Yankeetown.

At every meeting, we had member training this quarter presented by Jim Simon, FSO-MT. We went over the monthly Operations quizzes sent out to the members each month prior to the flotilla meeting. Our topic for the next several months will be a boating review based on the "*Boating Skills & Seamanship*" manual.

We continue to provide weekend patrols where we found several ATON deficiencies and reported them. Twenty-four patrols were scheduled this past quarter, and we were able to complete twenty. The increase in our patrol AOR to include the Florida Barge Canal and the Withlacoochee River has been very valuable to our operations program and will benefit our SAR cases in this area.

The flotilla was able to provide safety patrols on all three days during the Labor Day holiday weekend. We also provided a second boat for a QE mission with Flotilla 15-4 on the Homosassa River. We conducted several two-boat patrols on the Crystal River with a Flotilla 15-5 facility. Our flotilla was involved in one SAR mission this past quarter.

As we come to the end of the year, I cannot be more proud of what Flotilla 15-1 has accomplished so far this year. As of this report, we have recorded over 15,000 volunteer hours, 1,400 underway patrol hours, 380 program visits and 277 vessel exams, which is fantastic.

Throughout 2015, I presented 112 various individual, unit and team awards of achievement. In addition, eight members earned auxiliary certifications, twelve members received Auxiliary Performance Awards, and nine members received Sustained Auxiliary Service Awards.

During our COW, three members received the Flotilla Award of Commendation and congratulations to the flotilla's "Auxiliarist of the Year," Dan Farrar.

Congratulations to the 15-1 members who received awards during the year and at the Division & Flotilla Change of Watch. Well done members "BRAVO ZULU"!

As I end my term as Flotilla Commander and submit my last division FC report, I want to wish everyone a very successful 2016!

15-3 Ocala by Mary Patton, FC

Flotilla 15-3 had no direct support activity to the Coast Guard.

We had one *About Boating Safely* class with 24 graduates, thanks in large part to Dolores Spain, now our FSO-PE.

The flotilla's Change of Watch was held on November 21 at the Olive Garden restaurant in Ocala.

15-4 Homosassa by George Dooris, Outgoing FC

During the fourth quarter of 2015, Flotilla 15-4 conducted five patrols resulting in a total of 31 patrols carried out in 2016. This resulted in 161 hours on the Homosassa River for the year. Mandated classes continue to be offered at flotilla meetings during the fourth quarter with six classes held by the end of the year. The one-hour TCT class was also offered during the fourth quarter. We completed a Seamanship class (AUXSEA) with students from both 15-4 and 15-1. We continue to cooperate with the Crystal River Flotilla by providing instructors for their BS&S class and occasional Watchstander for their patrols. Crystal River provided a boat and crew for a QE mission for three coxswains in the Homosassa Flotilla. All coxswains successfully requalified. Numerous articles have been submitted for publication, mainly in the Citrus County Chronicle. We also continue doing Program Visits with our members having made 199 visits this year, and we have conducted 82 Vessel Safety Checks during the year. Finally, we have been providing two Radio Watchstanders to Coast Guard Station Yankeetown on a weekly basis, a service that has been provided for nearly 16 years.

15-8 Hernando by James Nastelli, FC

I need to start this message by acknowledging all who stepped up during December. It was a typically busy closing month with the annual Brooksville Christmas parade, our Christmas party, the Yankeetown holiday party, and several patrols. Many thanks to those who took time out of their own holiday season to decorate the building, prepare food, clean up after events, serve as instructors, staff our patrols and radios, and all the many other tasks that were necessary to make the month successful.

As we start yet another New Year, it is important to thank all those members who gave of their time and energy generously to provide leadership during 2015 and to welcome those who have agreed to take their place. I'd like to begin by thanking two of our 2015 flotilla staff officers who won't be continuing in their roles for 2016. Chet Bowman, FSO-MT, and John Schuck, FSO-PV. We are indebted to both for their service to the flotilla. I also want to thank Ray O'Connell, IPFC, and Chuck Dolan, IPVFC, and all of the continuing FSOs for their service during 2015. Bravo Zulu to all for a job well done!!

I would be remiss if I didn't recognize the many contributions of the Hernando Beach Marine Safety Support Group. While the work they perform is often "behind the scenes," the Monday morning crew keeps the building clean and operational. They replace broken fixtures, change our lighted signs, replace worn and tattered flags, mow and trim the lawn, cook for various fellowship events, conduct two garage sales, and the list goes on and on. We all owe them our gratitude.

The year ahead will be challenging. Fortunately, we are fully staffed with FSOs. New to the staff are Ray O'Connell as FSO-MT, Dennis Skonecki as FSO-HR, and Mike Bollinger moves to FSO-VE/PV. Join me in welcoming them and our continuing FSOs who will provide leadership for each of our functional areas during 2016.

As an organization we are very committed to leadership succession planning. So, if you are interested in serving as an assistant to any of our FSOs, please contact them, Bruce Ristich, VFC, or myself.

In closing, please keep our troops and our sick and injured members in your thoughts. And as always be safe, have fun, and *Semper Paratus*.

Staff Officer Reports



SO-CM, George Dooris—Communication Services

I have been SO-CM for just a few weeks, so there is nothing substantial to report. I have been a member of the Auxiliary for almost 16 years and have been a radio Watchstander at Station Yankeetown for nearly all of that time. Most of my experience has been with VHF, but the Auxiliary appears to be placing an increased importance on the use of HF. This will be a learning experience for me and, I suspect, for the majority of flotilla communications' staff officers. We can learn together.

SO-CS, Randy Patton—Communication Services

Several updates and changes have been made to the division website and calendar.



SO-MT, Ray O'Connell—Member Training

I'd like to take this opportunity to introduce myself and set the stage a bit for 2016 in the area of member training. My name is Ray O'Connell and I'm the IPFC and FSO-MT for Flotilla 15-8 in Hernando Beach. I serve the Auxiliary as a coxswain, TCO, VE, PV and instructor. I have a strong interest in member training and hope to continue in the footsteps of my predecessor, Randy Patton, who set a high bar, and I appreciate his efforts.

In many ways, 2016 be a watershed year for member training. By the end of the year, the full impact of the new mandated training classes will be felt by all of our members. Consequently, much of this year will be devoted to helping our membership complete these classes....no small task. Fortunately I will be working with an experienced MT team from across the Division - James Simon (15-1), Dolores Spain (15-3) and Patricia Dooris (15-4). I thank each of them for their willingness to serve.

I'd like to remind all members that there is a Member Training section on the Division 15 website (<http://www.uscgaux.info/content.php?unit=070-15&category=TRAINING>). This area already has information about the mandated training classes, a link to the online MT site, and information about the requirements for earning AUXOP status. Soon it will also list, by flotilla, all Division 15 member-training classes and flotilla contact people once those schedules have been set. I encourage all members to use the site to determine where and when member training courses are being offered. By collaborating across flotillas, we will more easily be able to help our membership complete their member training requirements.

I look forward to working with you in the upcoming year. *Semper Paratus.*

SO-OP, Andy Render—Operations



One of the things you are going to hear a lot about this year is SAFETY. Last year one of our district OPFACs was involved in a serious incident in which the entire crew was ejected into the water. Just recently, there was another incident where a crewman fell into the water while docking their vessel. Fortunately, there were no fatalities. While all of us know that "it will never happen to me," I can assure you those individuals felt exactly the same way.

This year we are going to focus on two different facets of crew safety—Prevention and Survival. In the area of prevention, I am asking every flotilla to conduct the 2016 Operations Workshop. While we will not make it mandatory, I strongly urge every flotilla to make sure ALL their Surface Operations people attend the workshop. We will post the training schedule for the flotilla workshops on our division web site. This should help to make sure everyone has an opportunity to attend.

It is strongly recommended that prior to every patrol, the coxswain take a few minutes to review safety procedures and to check everyone's PPE. Since training is a part of all our patrols, weather permitting, "man overboard" drills should be conducted on a routine basis.

Regarding survival, the Auxiliary is taking a giant step forward this year in ensuring that everyone in surface operations has the same safety equipment as our active duty and reserve counterparts. Some flotillas may issue the PPE directly to their members, while others may issue the equipment as you report for a patrol. In either case, you will have the necessary safety equipment when you leave the dock. Someone from Sector St. Pete will conduct a mandatory training session in our area discussing the new Rescue and Survival equipment procedures in detail.

Let's have a safe boating season—and remember, "*You don't have to go out—but you do have to come back!*"

SO-PA, Kitty Dolan—Outgoing Public Affairs

Massing of the Colors sponsored by the U.S. Navy Submarine Vets Association was held on Sunday, Nov. 8, 2015, at 3:00 PM at the Homosassa Methodist Church. Four members of 15-1 marched in with flags representing the U.S. Coast Guard Auxiliary. Seaman Johnson, USCG, participated with the U.S. Coast Guard flag representing Station Yankeetown

Jodi Simon, FSO-PB, 15-1, received the First Place award for "Best Photograph in District 7" for her submission of the photo "*Memorial Day*" to the National Photo Contest.

There have been several articles published by 15-4 in The Citrus County *Chronicle*.

The monthly issue of *Tripod Times*, newsletter of flotilla 15-8, was sent to all members via email and posted on the flotilla web page.

SO-PE, Dolores Spain—Public Education

The Year in Review...

Flotilla 15-1

Three *About Boating Safely* classes were completed with 41 graduates. 24 students were under the age of 17 and the class was taught at the Academy of Environmental Science; a Citrus County Charter School.

Two *Boating Safely & Seamanship* classes were completed with 17 graduates. Total: 58 graduates.

Flotilla 15-2

On 3 and 4 November, 37 students under the age of 17 and six adults completed the ABS course at the Dunnellon Christian Academy. Total: 43 graduates.

Flotilla 15-3

On 14 March 2015, 24 participants completed the ABS course. Nine of the graduates were under the age of 17. Two of the adult participants required an instructor to read the test to them. Total: 24 graduates.

Flotilla 15-4

A *Paddlesports* class was given on 28 March with 5 students graduating.

The 25 June *About Boating Safely* course was completed with eight graduates. Total: 13 graduates.

Flotilla 15-7

An ABS course was held on 18 July with one graduate. The ABS course held on 5 September was completed with two adults and five students under the age of 17. Total: 8 graduates.

Flotilla 15-8

The *About Boating Safely* course was offered five times this year with 45 students graduating.

The *Boating Safety & Seamanship* course was offered three times this year with 40 students graduating.

Weekend Navigator was offered three times with 42 students completing the course.

Nautical Charts was offered three times with 15 students completing the course.

Paddlesports was offered three times with seven students completing the course.

Suddenly in Command was offered three times. Only two students completed the course.

How to Use your Marine Radio was offered three times to 35 students.

186 participants completed the courses offered.

SO-PB, Mary Patton—Publications

Four flotillas published newsletters during the quarter. The Summer/Fall issue of the *Charlie Noble* was published.

The *Charlie Noble* was awarded Second Place in the District 7 Division Newsletter Contest for the second year in a row.

SO-SR, Vera Bystry-Wells—Secretary/Records

Minutes from the January quarterly meeting will be sent out.

SO-VE, Josef Weiss—Vessel Examination

15-1: No VE activity for the month of December. Paul Jordan is the new FSO-VE.

15-2: No VE activity for the month of December.

15-3: VE booth was setup at Lake Weir boat ramp during Christmas Parade. Several vessel exams were conducted.

15-7: Flotilla 15-7 had a banner year. No VEs in December, but the flotilla set up a PA table at Suwanee River boat ramp in Fanning Springs and handed out safety material to the boating public during the Christmas Boat and Light Parade presented by the Chamber of Commerce.

To recap 2015, Flotilla 15-7 also participated in the Pirate Festival at Cedar Key, FL, as well as the International Coastal Cleanup Day at Cedar Key. FSO-VE Josef Weiss took leadership of the VE program, and conducted a total of 65 VEs, over 40 were paddlecraft. The goal for 2016 is to conduct over 100 VSCs.

15-8: December was another quiet month for vessel examinations.

As of today our official count is 271 exams done. This should settle around 280 when all the paperwork catches up.

December Nuts 'n Bolts Training



Richard Culp, a previous SO-CM, spoke on Auxiliary Communications because George Dooris, current SO-CM, could not attend the meeting.
Photo by Mary Patton



Andy Render, VCDR and SO-OP, spoke on operations and FC reports..
Photo by Mary Patton



Larry Berman, SO-IS, explains how to access AUXINFO and AUX Directory. Photo by Mary Patton

Division 15's Nuts 'n Bolts training took place on Saturday, 12 December. The reason for this training is to give newly-elected flotilla commanders and flotilla vice commanders training and direction on what they can expect when they take office on the first of January. For instance, when reports are due, what to include in the reports, the flotilla vice commander (VFC) as chief of staff, etc.

Division staff officers (SOs) gave a five- to ten-minute talk to the FCs-elect on what their duties are and, conversely, what the flotilla staff officers (FSOs) of the same designation should do down the chain in the flotillas. Most FCs attended, as well as the FCs(e) and VFCs(e).

January SO/FSO Training

On Saturday, January 23, 2016, division staff officers (SO) and flotilla staff officers (FSO) met at the West Citrus Community Center for several hours of training. This training brings the SOs and FSOs together to provide the FSOs knowledge of their duties within their flotilla, sending their monthly reports along the chain of parallel staffing, and what to include in their reports. All division staff officers attended the meeting.

Everyone agreed that good information was passed along to all the new FSOs and that it was a worthwhile training session.

Now, More Than Ever!

by Michael Moore, SO-PA

We now live in an information age that can often overwhelm us. Never before in the history of mankind has the knowledge and learning of the entire human race been available quite literally “in the palm of your hand.” We are bombarded with opinions, factoids, enlightening (and depressing) quotes, sayings, and motivational messages nearly every minute of the day.

Despite this phenomenon, despite having enormous amounts of wisdom at our fingertips, people still die unnecessarily on the water doing what most people would consider a “relaxing” activity. In 2014, more than 330 people drowned while boating in Florida waters because they were not wearing a life jacket. We know this is a totally unacceptable number! Three hundred thirty funerals, three hundred thirty families grieving and hundreds of wage earners lost! With plenty of facts available instantly, why does this still have to happen? The Coast Guard Auxiliary is fighting to keep it from happening by teaching boating safety, by providing vessel exams, and by talking about safety procedures to boaters at PA events.

Boating safety is one of our primary missions. Our message of safe boating can easily be occluded in the cloud of information static which pervades people's lives. Our message to wear protective gear while boating hasn't changed. What has changed, however, is the way that message is delivered. Now, more than ever, it is time to perk up our messages to stay competitive in the information marketplace. Three hundred thirty souls are worth every effort we can muster.

Announcing: The Second Annual Great Chili Taste-Off

by Linda Jones, FC, 15-1 and Division Fellowship Officer

At last year's “Chili Taste-Off” at Station Yankeetown, approximately 30 people attended. Five Auxiliary members and BM1 Michael Shallue, USCG, Executive Petty Officer at the Station, prepared chili for tasting. Prizes were provided by Division 15. Everyone had a good time, and the active duty members really enjoyed sampling all the homemade chili.

This year, our second annual “Chili Taste-Off” will take place on Wednesday, 23 March. Members who are bringing their chili are asked to arrive by 1100 to set up their crockpots (or whatever they are using to keep their chili hot.) Tasting/judging will begin at 1130 hours.

Flotilla Commanders—please ask your members to notify Linda Jones by phone or email to let her know that they are participating. It would be great to have some VEGETARIAN chili this year. Last year, we had a request from one of the Coasties, who gave up meat for Lent, to have some vegetarian chili. All members are invited to attend.



Last year, FS2 Braden Coon, USCG, and Vince Maida, AUXFS, show off their tasty corn muffins. Photo by Linda Jones



Last year's inaugural Chili Taste-Off shows the active members of Station Yankeetown enjoying the chilis and various accoutrements.

Photo by Linda Jones

Crystal River Sets Up PA Booth at the 19th Annual Manatee Festival



L to R: Ralph Altavilla, 15-1, visiting Auxiliarists Helen and Bill Cummings from Flotilla 26, Sylvan Beach, NY, explain different safe boating brochures to visitors at the 19th Annual Manatee Festival in Crystal River on 16 January 2016.
Photo by Robert A. Fabich, Sr.



Andy Render, VCDR, explains the *What You Should Know Before You Go Boating* brochure to Arlando Madison, Jr. at the 19th Annual Manatee Festival in Crystal River.
Photo by Robert A. Fabich, Sr.

Auxiliary Hosts Holiday Celebrations for the Gold Side



Flotilla 15-1 prepared the holiday luncheon for Station Yankeetown personnel. The themed meal was ethnic flavors, and the *Cookies for Coasties* program was a big hit. Each active duty member received a gift card, as well.
Photo by Robert A. Fabich, Sr.



Station Yankeetown personnel at their Holiday Party hosted by Flotilla 15-8 at their flotilla building. The flotilla members prepared a barbecue pork dinner.
Photo by Robert A. Fabich, Sr.



In Memoriam—The *Blackthorn* Disaster

by Karen Miller, SO-PB Division 11

Reprinted with permission of the Author and the Editor of Flotilla 11-1's *Channel Marker*

The ship was nearly 35 years old when it carried 23 Coast Guardsmen to a watery grave in Tampa Bay on January 28, 1980. The USCGC *Blackthorn*, WLB391, was a 180 foot buoy tender which had been undergoing an overhaul at the Gulf Tampa Drydock Company and on that fateful night was leaving to return to its home base in Galveston, TX. It collided with an incoming vessel – the oil tanker *Capricorn* that was three times its size and 30 times its weight - which caused the *Blackthorn* to capsize. The *Blackthorn* carried a normal complement of 50. A large monument was erected on a piece of land about two miles from the disaster scene. The name, rank, birth date, and home city of 23 Coast Guardsmen is inscribed on it. It is situated where travelers using the rest stop on the Sunshine Skyway causeway can see it and perhaps dwell for a moment on the service these 23 men performed during their lives and about the perils of traveling by sea.



U.S. Coast Guard members hold 23 roses to honor those who lost their lives that fateful day. Photo by Karen Miller

This year, as in years past, a large group of people will gather together at this monument on January 28. They will include some of the surviving crew, relatives of the victims, the Coast Guard family, and several other organizations. The victims' families come from as far away as California and Texas. They come to remember and to witness that others care enough to remember. The Memorial Service is always impressive with an aerial salute by Coast Guard Air Station Clearwater to the benediction and taps. Twenty-three individual roses are laid on the monument by Sector St Pete personnel as the names of the lost Coast Guardsmen are read. Usually there is a brief talk and the speaker normally makes the point that this tragedy is a reminder that well equipped and trained personnel

are not invincible. In prior years they have spoken about the effects of new technology that were not available to the *Blackthorn's* crew. This technology assists the everyday functions of the ship far better than the 1980 technology. Additionally, the crew is more educated and experienced in the operations of a cutter. The Coast Guard Auxiliary has been a major participant by their presence at these memorials during the years since 1980. Flotilla 11-1 has been a part of that presence year after year. The lost are lost, but those who know and loved them live on, knowing that there is a large group of people who care.



A member of the Coast Guard Cutter *William Flores* crew salutes the Cutter *Blackthorn* Memorial. U.S. Coast Guard photo by Petty Officer 2nd Class Patrick Kelley.

The Coast Guard Cutter *Blackthorn* was constructed at Marine Iron and Shipbuilding Corp. in Duluth, MN. She was a 180 foot buoy tender and was one of the largest tenders ever built for the U.S. Coast Guard. The work was started on May of 1943, launched July 1943, and commissioned in March of 1944.

Blackthorn's first duty was as an ice breaker on the Great Lakes. Later that same year it was reassigned to San Pedro, California. The *Blackthorn's* primary mission from this point forward was maintaining buoys and other aids to navigation in the Pacific. *Blackthorn* operated out of San Pedro, servicing aids to navigation until December 1949. Other duties included salvaging a naval helicopter on 17 November 1948 and assisting distressed craft on 4 July 1949 and 19 October 1949. In early 1950, *Blackthorn* was reassigned to Mobile, Alabama and transited via the Panama Canal. She serviced aids to navigation there until July 1976. While assigned to Mobile, *Blackthorn* searched for survivors of *Esso Greensboro*, which had collided with *Esso Suez* on 22 April 1951; assisted distressed merchantmen on *Ocean Pride* on 27 July 1951, *Kerry Mac* on 2 October 1951, *Mission Carmel* on 27 June 1952, and *Beatrice* on 16 April 1954. *Blackthorn* also assisted *Miss Cain Joy* on 25 July 1959. On 27-28 August 1952, the cutter assisted in the search for survivors of a B-17 crash and on 18-25 February 1953, searched for survivors of National Air-

(Continued on page 12)

In Memoriam—The *Blackthorn* Disaster

(Continued from page 11)

lines Flight 470. Between May and June 1953 *Blackthorn* recovered the wreckage of the National Airlines plane and in April 1954 it salvaged an Air Force plane. On 8 May 1956 *Blackthorn* searched for two missing naval PGF aircraft. In October 1957 *Blackthorn* assisted a sister ship, *Iris*, after *Iris* had beached itself after being holed. *Blackthorn* was reassigned to Galveston, Texas in 1976.

Buoy tenders have traditionally had long careers – many serving more than 45 years. Aside from routine maintenance, *Blackthorn* was modernized throughout its career. In 1968 it received air conditioning improvements in the heating and ventilation system and a new 100kw generator. *Blackthorn* received an "Austere Renovation" in 1972. Crew berthing, heads, and the dispensary were renewed plus a new lounge and Pollution Abatement System were added. From October 1979 through late January 1980 *Blackthorn* was overhauled in Tampa, Florida.

Blackthorn had just completed her overhaul, and was outward bound from Tampa Bay on the night of January 28, 1980. Meanwhile the tanker *Capricorn* was heading into the Bay. The captain, Lieutenant Commander George Sepel, was on the bridge of the cutter, but ENS John Ryan had the conn. Having been overtaken by the Russian passenger ship *Kazakhstan*, *Blackthorn* continued almost in mid-channel. The brightly lit passenger vessel obscured the ability of the crews of *Blackthorn* and *Capricorn* to see each other. *Capricorn* began to turn left, but this would not allow the ships to pass port-to-port. Unable to make radio contact with the tender, *Capricorn's* pilot blew two short whistle blasts to have the ships pass starboard-to-starboard. With the officer of the deck confused in regard to the standard operating procedure, *Blackthorn's* captain issued orders for evasive action. Though the ships collided, damage did not seem to be extensive. The problem, however, was that *Capricorn's* anchor was ready for letting go. It became imbedded in *Blackthorn's* hull and ripped open the port side. Just seconds after the slack in the anchor chain became taut, *Blackthorn* capsized. Six off-duty personnel who had mustered when they heard the collision alarm were trapped in the dark. Several crew members who had just reported aboard tried to escape and in the process trapped themselves in the engine room. Though 27 crewmen survived the collision, 23 perished.

In the end, the primary responsibility for the collision was placed with LCDR Sepel as he had permitted an

inexperienced junior officer to conn the ship in an unfamiliar waterway with heavy traffic. The Commandant of the United States Coast Guard, Admiral John B. Hayes, approved the report of the marine board of investigation. The board determined that the cause of the casualty was the failure of both vessels to keep well to the side of the channel which lay on their starboard side. Concurring with the marine board's determination of the cause, the Commandant emphasized in his "Action" that the failure of the persons in charge of both vessels to ascertain the intentions of the other through the exchange of appropriate whistle signals was the primary contributing cause. Additionally, Admiral Hayes pointed out that attempts to establish a passing agreement by using only radiotelephone communications failed to be an adequate substitute for exchanging proper whistle signals.

Three weeks later, the *Blackthorn* was raised but the damage was too extensive for repairs. The *Blackthorn* was towed 20 miles offshore to the Pinellas #2 Artificial Reef Site and sunk in 80 feet of water. The ship is broken into two large sections which rise 1520 feet off the bottom. The major sections are upside down. The ship has become heavily encrusted and has attracted a large amount of marine life. Goliath grouper, snapper, mackerel, schools of spadefish and even some whale sharks have been spotted in the area. At 27°52.57'N / 083°11.28'W, the *Blackthorn* is one of the most popular wreck dives in the Tampa Bay area.

The *Blackthorn* tragedy provided the impetus for the establishment of the Command and Operations School at the Coast Guard Academy in New London, Connecticut. The school offers courses to prepare command-level officers and senior enlisted members for command duty afloat. Commanding officers are now required to formally assess risks such as transiting an unfamiliar port at night and are given full discretion and encouraged to say no if they feel the risks involved are unnecessary. Additionally, the Coast Guard developed new training requirements, spent more money on safety equipment, and made changes to the navigational aids in and around Tampa Bay.

On January 28, 2016, the 36th remembrance for the USCGC *Blackthorn*, Coast Guardsmen will be held at the *Blackthorn* Memorial Park, north end of the Sunshine Skyway Bridge, US 19 South and I-275 South. Local and Seventh District active duty, reserve and Auxiliary personnel will be attending. Uniform is Tropical Blue or Service Dress Blue.



Division Change of Watch Gallery

All Photos by Mary Patton



15-1 Table



15-2, 15-3 & 15-5 Table



15-4 & 15-7 Table



15-8 Table



CAPT Gregory Case, USCG, Commander, Sector St. Pete, Paulette Parent, D-CAPT W, and Judith Hudson, DCOS.



Randy Patton received the Auxiliary Achievement Medal from CAPT Case.



Linda Jones received the Auxiliary Achievement Medal Award from CAPT Case.



Richard Culp received the Auxiliary Commandant's Letter of Commendation Award from CAPT Case



L to R: Vera Bystry-Wells, 15-8, and Dolores Spain, 15-3, received the Auxiliary Century Award for completing 100 VEs and/or PVs during 2014.



Jodi Simon, 15-1, received the District 7 Best Photograph Award for her Memorial Day photo.



Larry Berman, DDC-P and SO -IS, with Judith Hudson, DCOS



Mark Moore and Leslie Moore, FC, 15-2.



Paul Pelletier, IPDCDR, receives the Commodore's Cup Award for the Best Division of the Year—2014.



The Commodore's Cup Award

Change of Watch Photos



15-1—Ken Hollsten received the Flotilla Commendation Award. Photo by Robert A. Fabich, Sr.



15-1—Flotilla Staff Officers received staff awards. Kneeling, L to R: BMC Robert Whitmore, USCG, OIC, Station Yankeetown, and BM1 Michael Shallue, USCG, XPO at Station Yankeetown. Photo by Robert A. Fabich, Sr.



15-7—L to R: Diane Berman, DCDR, swearing in Josef Weiss as FC, and Donald Sorli, Sr., as VFC. Photo by Don Sorli, Jr.



15-3—L to R: Randy Patton, VFC, Mary Patton, FC, BM1 Michael Shallue, USCG, XPO Station Yankeetown, and Diane Berman, DCDR. Photo by Andy Render



15-3—L to R: Randy Patton, Michael Casey, Maia Jefferson, Dolores Spain, Roger Lippincott and Mary Patton. Photo by Andy Render



15-8 Jeff Hoff received an Auxiliary Commandant's Letter of Commendation for outstanding performance in Public Education at the COW. Photo by Kitty Dolan



15-8—Diane Berman, DCDR, and BMC Robert Whitmore, USCG, OIC, Station Yankeetown, present the Commodore's Certificate of Excellence to Kitty Dolan. Photo by Melody Whitmore



15-8—L to R: Diane Berman, DCDR, James Nastelli, FC, and Bruce Ristich, VFC. Photo by Chuck Dolan

January Division 15 Meeting Photos



L to R: Vera Bystry-Wells, SO-SR; BM1 Michael Shallue, USCG, XPO, Station Yankee-town; Diane Berman, DCDR; Andy Render, VCDR; and Paul Pelletier, IPDCDR. Photo by Mary Patton



FC table at the 9 January Division Meeting. Photo by Michael Moore



Andy Render, VCDR, and Diane Berman, DCDR, swear in new Division Staff Officers Michael Moore, SO-PA, and Ralph Altavilla, SO-PV. Photo by Mary Patton



Ray O'Connell, SO-MT, and Randy Patton, SO-CS. Photo by Mary Patton



BM1 Michael Shallue, USCG, and Diane Berman, DCDR. Photo by Michael Moore