

IN THIS ISSUE:

- ♥ JOINT AIR-SEA OPS
- ♥ NEW DVC-OA
- ♥ LINE HANDLING COMMANDS

Joint Air-Sea Operations – A Proposal for Synergy

By Wilson Riggan, DVC-OA

An opportunity that receives little attention in our operations is the combination of air and surface facilities. While we have procedures and tools for such operations, they are seldom used. Significant benefits are available from such combinations, as we will explore below.

Each type of facility, air and surface, has its own set of strengths and weaknesses. There being little overlap in those areas, each makes up for the shortcomings of the other. When used in combination, they provide a powerful force.



Surface vessels provide direct access to the water, an opportunity for up-close viewing and direct contact with the objective, whether it's a distressed vessel whose position is already known or one that is the subject of a search. In either case, a surface asset is the only way to have direct access to the subject. On the other hand, a significant shortcoming of surface vessels is that they have a relatively slow speed and have a very close-in visual range, which dictates very close track spacing in search patterns in addition to a high probability of missing a target if they don't happen upon it directly.

Air assets, by contrast, shine in those areas. Their speed is between 5 and 10 times the speed of most boats. Their visual range is limited more by atmospheric and visual acuity than by their distance to the horizon. Although flight visibility is often more than 10 miles, such is rarely counted on in an actual search. More typical track spacing is 2 or 3 miles, in order to maximize the probability of detection. Unlike its surface counterpart, the obvious shortcoming of an air asset is the inability to have direct contact with the subject vessel. We have few helicopters in Auxiliary aviation

[Continued on Page 2](#)

New Division Chief in Aviation

By Wilson Riggan

As your new DVC-OA (Chief Airedale, according to my surface-based friends), I would like to take a moment to introduce myself and to share with you a bit about our staff. Many faces are the same, but some have changed positions, and some are new.

I should begin by telling you about myself. I am from the Air Station Miami AOR of District 7, where I am an Aircraft Commander and an IP/FE. I have also served the last 2 years in the Flight Safety Branch of our national staff. Having had the luxury of both parents being private pilots, I grew up around small airports and airplanes, and learned to fly before I learned to drive a car. Until joining the aviation program of the Auxiliary, all of my flying has been in the civilian world, from learning to fly in a Cessna 182 to the Boeing 757 and 767, which I currently fly internationally.

In over 15,000 hours of flying, which spans 40 years, I have been a flight instructor and a pilot in charter, commuter, corporate, and major airline operations. I have been an FAA-designated check airman in those environments as well,

[Continued on page 4](#)

Joint Sea-Air

[Continued from page 1](#)

and even those do not deploy rescue swimmers. Thus, our aircraft must depend on radio contact or visual signals to communicate with the subject vessel and its occupants.

The Auxiliary does have procedures for our aircraft and surface vessels to work together. Body language, visible from the air, can be used to communicate a specific set of messages to aircraft. In turn, there are a few basic messages, such as “yes, no, or go this way,” which can be communicated from the aircraft to those on the surface. These messages are taught to our pilots, but not to many of our coxswains.

We also have ways for surface and air facilities to identify one another. One of these is the Surface to Air Recognition Banner. This is a 3-ft by 3-ft orange square with a large black “A” on it. Made from



nylon, it has grommets on the corners to provide a method of securing. It is placed on a vessel’s horizontal surface that is visible from above. This banner is easily visible from 500 to 1000 feet, our most common flight altitudes when working with

things on the surface. If we are to begin to work together as proposed, having these on our surface facilities will help greatly.

There are also prescribed aircraft markings that can assist surface facilities in identifying our aircraft. There are two options: the words, “RESCUE” or “PATROL” placed on the underside of a wing or the fuselage, or a set of identification stripes and Auxiliary logo, which together closely resembles the well-known Coast Guard Identification Insignia, but with the blue and orange colors reversed.

Details of both of these identification methods can be found in Sections D and E of Chapter 3 in the Auxiliary Operations Policy Manual, COMDTINST 16798.3E.

While these tools will be helpful, what we really need in working together is an awareness of one another’s activities and doing joint training exercises. We are all familiar with working in concert with Coast Guard helicopters and surface vessels in our activities, especially in SAR situations. This is true of both our surface fleet and our aviation assets. What is not common, however, is our

[Continued on Page 4](#)

LHR or LHC - Which do you use?

By Howard Friedman

“Hey Joe, toss the line next to you on the dock”. “Hey Larry, grab that line over there”. The above are examples of what I refer to as Line Handling Requests (LHR). LHR are used commonly, if not always, by recreational boaters. Some of you might be saying, “So what’s wrong with them? I use them all of the time and they work.” The truth be told, so do I. They work because recreational boaters, for the most part, are on the same boat with their same friends. Under those conditions, the boaters probably wouldn’t even have to say a word and would successfully accomplish such tasks as, tying up to, or leaving a dock with just those simple non specific commands.

On the other hand, the USCG uses standard Line Handling Commands (LHC). These commands can be found in COMDNTINST M3520.2a The Coast Guard’s choice (LHC vs. LHR) is dictated by the fact that “procedural uniformity” is absolutely necessary when seamen serve on different vessels (from 23 foot utility boats to 300 foot cutters) and under different commanders.

[Continued on Page 3](#)

LHR or LHC

[Continued from page 2](#)

Under those conditions, being on the "same page" is not a luxury, it's a necessity.

Okay, so if recreational LHR (requests) do the job, why should Auxiliarists use LHC (commands)? When on patrol, we are under the orders of the USCG. We wear their uniform. In addition, we are seen by the public as the USCG. This means that everything we do reflects on the USCG. While on patrol, the USCG often maintains our radio guard. Therefore, even though we are not on their facilities, we are continually communicating with them, and we use their comms procedures. It also makes sense that we attempt to use as many of their other uniform procedures as possible. After all, it is possible that at times we may be granted the opportunity to serve on one of their vessels. Or, it's possible that they may need to place one of their seamen on our facilities. Under those scenarios, it would be far more efficient to be talking the same language. To that end, I have added to my Pre-Underway Checklist a reminder to my crew that, although we are essentially recreational boaters, we will be using USCG procedures while on patrol.

Here is a recap of that terminology.

LINE NUMBERS - The same as for alongside towing:
Line 1 - Attaches to bow cleat
Line 2 - Attaches to the cleat aft of the bow line
Line 3 - Attaches to the cleat forward of stern cleat
Line 4 - Attaches to the stern cleat

On our typically smaller facilities, when tying up temporarily to a dock, we may use only lines 1 and 4.

The Commands and the Resultant Actions.

TYING UP AT A DOCK:
Command - PUT OVER/PASS (line number)

Action - Boat crewman tosses line to dock crewman with enough slack to tie off to the cleat/bollard on the dock.

Command - HOLD (line number)

Action - Dock crewman takes one Round Turn over the cleat and holds line.

Command - CHECK (line number)

Action - Dock crewman holds heavy tension on the line but will render it as necessary to prevent parting the line.

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Number 2-09

Command - SLACK (line number)

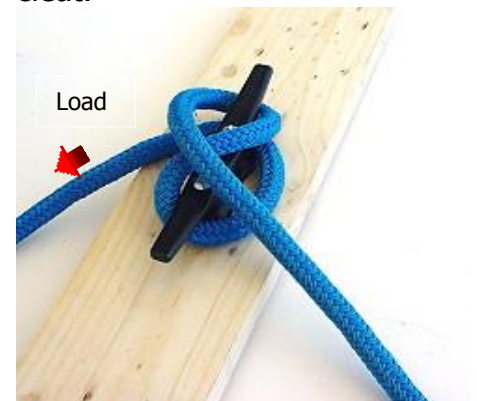
Action - Take all tension off the line and let it hang slack.

Command - EASE (line number)

Action - Let line out until it is under is less tension, but not slack.

Command - MAKE (line number)

Res. Act. - One Round Turn, and a Figure Eight, on the cleat.



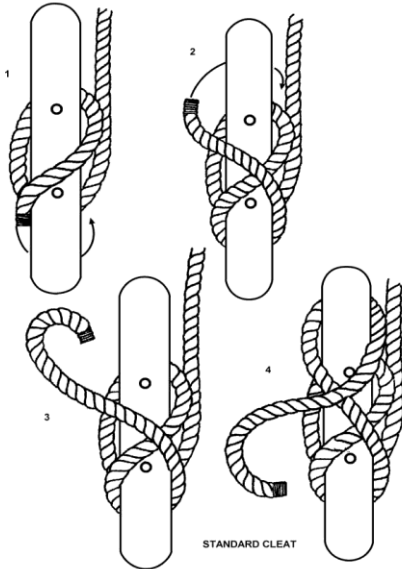
From the Boat Crew Seamanship Manual (M16114.5c) finish up securing the line by adding 2 more figure 8's if possible. Here is

[Continued on Page 4](#)

LHR or LHC

[Continued from page 3](#)

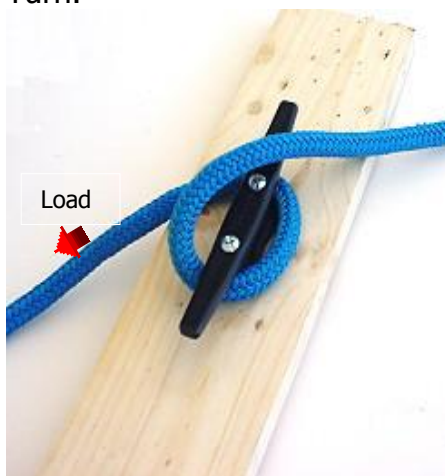
Figure 7-39 from that manual with just the initial figure 8.



LEAVING A DOCK:

Command - SINGLE UP (line number)

Res. Act. - Dock crewman undoes any half hitches figure eights and leaves one Round Turn.



Command - CAST OFF (line number)

Res. Act. - Dock crewman takes the Round Turn off of the cleat and replies "(line number) CLEAR"

New DVC

[Continued from Page 1](#)

and was an Aviation Safety Counselor. I have had the privilege of doing things as diverse as banner towing, flying freight in a Beech 18, STOL commuter operations in a Britten-Norman Islander, and instructing in the Boeing 737-800.

In addition, I did a tour in the FAA as an air traffic controller, which gave me valuable insight and understanding about how the national airspace system works. I have served as an accident investigator, and as a safety advocate and expert, both on behalf of my airline and its pilots union, and am a member of the FAA's Air Traffic Procedures Advisory Committee, which I was privileged to chair for 4 years.

You have a great staff here, as well, to help provide a vibrant, workable program that will enable our flight crews to be productive, safe additions to the Coast Guard's aviation capabilities. We have made some adjustments, from Byron

Moe returning to his first love, Safety, to Don Zinner moving to Training, and Mike Hopfensperger being promoted to branch chief, Recruiting. Responding to the continuing aging of our fleet, we have created a Maintenance branch and have asked Steve Kokkins to move over and help us get that started. We have added new faces as well... including a real dynamo, Gary Nepple, who has joined our Training branch. Some folks have stayed in place, such as Dennis Caponigro and Jenny Stack in Flight Standards, and Bob Hampton as our Flight Surgeon. Bob Fratangelo continues to be our liaison for Homeland Security issues and Frank Tangel handles our AUX-18 C-School coordination and other management issues. In all, I am pleased and somewhat humbled to have

[Continued on page 5](#)

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New DVC

[Continued from Page 4](#)

the privilege of leading such a staff. I commit to you and to them my unyielding effort to support them in our joint responsibility – which is providing the best possible program for those of you who are out there doing the real work. Your national staff is here for you; we work for you. Please keep us informed of your needs, your problems, and your successes. We want to know how to improve the program and your experience in it.



Joint Sea-Air

[Continued from page 2](#)

Auxiliary aviation and surface assets working together. I believe there is a significant opportunity for improvement here.

When air assets are on patrol, are they aware of what surface assets are also in the area and vice versa? If so, it would be relatively simple for one to call the other, pass a set of coordinates or other location information, and have the aircraft attempt to locate the surface vessel. Similarly, it would be useful for the surface

vessel to get practice in vectoring (guiding) an aircraft to itself or another vessel. These practice sessions can pay great dividends when it comes to actual search and or assistance activities. They can be initiated by either group - the surface facilities or the aircraft. We are supposed to be one team, especially in crisis, but we rarely actually practice that way.



Work with your aviation and surface operations leaders to encourage cooperation and

joint training. Reach out to one another, share information about activities and identify opportunities for joint training. There may need to be protocol or procedures developed depending on the location. The mechanism for accomplishing this will necessarily vary from one District/Region to another, based on the types of surface and air activities routinely conducted. What does not vary, however, is that the knowledge that each group gains about working with the other will greatly enhance our operational capabilities and competence.

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