

U.S. Coast Guard Auxiliary Flotilla 17, Anacortes, WA

Island Time

Calendar:

- Flotilla 17 Meeting 1800 Tuesday, 20 October, Flounder Bay Restaurant, Anacortes. **Note new location!**
- Division 1 Meeting 1800 Thursday, 22 October, Cranberry Tree Restaurant, Mount Vernon. Guest speaker CAPT Suzanne Engelbert, Commander, Sector Seattle.
- Flotilla 17 Staff Meeting 0900 Monday, 2 November, Anacortes Bowling Alley.
- Flotilla 17 meeting 1800 Tuesday, 17 November, Flounder Bay Restaurant. Election of officers.
- Flotilla Procedures Academy 0800-1200 Saturday, 21 November, Anacortes Senior Center.
- Flotilla 17 Staff Meeting 0900 Monday, 7 December, Anacortes Bowling Alley.

Flotilla 17 Boats In Radiation Detection Exercise

By Andy Rothman, FSO-PB

Nine boats and crews from Flotilla 17 took part last month in a massive exercise designed to enhance the ability of U.S. security forces to protect against the threat of small nuclear weapons being smuggled into the country.

In all, nearly 100 Auxiliarists joined some 300 law enforcement and first-responder personnel around Puget Sound to test how well security forces can prevent such weapons, or their components, from being smuggled into major population areas aboard small vessels. "It was easily the largest exercise our flotilla has ever participated in," according to John Alexander, FSO-OP.

Coast Guard CAPT Dave Crowley said the ultimate objective "is to safely identify and interdict radiological or nuclear weapons or materials as far away as possible from populated areas and critical facilities."

The scenario for the 23 September exercise was this: Intelligence reports indicated an attempt would be made to smuggle nuclear material into central and southern Puget Sound aboard a small vessel. Targets were the population centers of Seattle, Tacoma and Olympia and nearby military facilities at Bremerton, Fort Lewis and McChord Air Force Base.

To stop the attempt, law enforcement personnel coordinated by the Coast Guard would establish picket lines at three "choke points" entering the Sound: Admiralty Inlet at the



Steve Stein of Pacific Northwest National Laboratory briefs crews at an 0730 meeting at the LaConner marina before the exercise.

east entrance to the Strait of Juan de Fuca; Samish Bay on the northeast side of Whidbey Island, and Bellingham Bay. Flotilla 17 provided the boats at the Samish Bay site with "Good News" (John Bermingham), "Restless III" (John Alexander), "ETOPS" (Walt Barnard), "Bolero" (Chuck Spaeth), "C-Cakes" (Barry Daniel), "Playtime" (John Slagboom), "Anna Leigh" (David McKibben) and "Miyoko" (Willard Roberts) participating.

In an actual threat situation, all in-bound small boats would be stopped and screened. For the exercise, though, only designated boats were stopped. That's where the Auxiliary came in, with some 27 facilities crewed by 96 Auxiliarists playing the role of the bad

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guys. Forming the picket lines were Coast Guard small boats from Stations Seattle, Port Angeles and Bellingham and boats or personnel from U.S. Customs and Bor-



Everett Police Department boat stops “Restless III” for initial screening.

der Protection, the FBI, Washington State Patrol, Washington State National Guard and a dozen local police or sheriff’s



Coxswain John Alexander looks on as Coasties from Station Seattle board “Restless III” for a search.

departments. A Coast Guard cutter was positioned at each check point as control vessel.

From a muster area near Hope Island, Flotilla 17 boats were dispatched south to a narrow point in Skagit Bay



Photo by Bill McIntire

Law enforcement teams search for the radiation emitting device hidden on “Bolero.”

where law enforcement forces were waiting. At an initial stop information was gathered about the vessel and relayed to a second screening boat. In each case the second boat conducted a more thorough screening with hand-held or boat-mounted radiation detectors and then put a boarding team aboard to do a search. If they found anything suspicious a third team was called in to more thoroughly examine the boat. “Bolero” and “ETOPS” came in for special attention. Each carried devices that simulated radiation emissions. The “radiation” was picked up by detectors and the boats were thoroughly searched while their “cover stories” were checked to see whether they had a legitimate reason (such as commercial activities) to be carrying nuclear material.

“All of our personnel did an outstanding job,” said Bill Peterson, Maritime Project Manager at Pacific Northwest National Laboratory, which has spearheaded the three-year project to develop better detection techniques. “The portable radiation detection equipment performed as advertised and performance of the light-weight, boat-mounted equipment was tremendous.

“The exercise demonstrated that we can add another layer of defense and security to Puget Sound waters with minimal impact to law abiding small vessel operators.”

The Real Thing

After a very long day of role-playing in the nuclear radiation detection exercise on 23 Sept., two Flotilla 17 members got the opportunity to do “the real thing” on their way home.

David McKibben, FSO-CM and crew Dave Martens, FSO-PA had left the dock in LaConner aboard David’s operational facility “Anna Leigh” and were headed back to Anacortes when they came upon a small boat that



“Anna Leigh”

needed some help.

“We had just passed the Swinomish Channel railroad bridge when we spotted a small, aluminum fishing boat with what appeared to be three generations of men (grandfather, father and son) adrift with the cover of their outboard off, “ Dave Martens recalls. “David checked in with Group Port Angeles and then we rigged an alongside tow and returned them safely to the dock.”

Which goes to show, you never do know when your skills as an Auxiliarist are going to be needed.



Photo by John Bermingham

Flotilla 17 members enjoyed sunshine, fellowship and good food at the rendezvous 12 September at Fisherman’s Bay, Lopez Island.

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