

# Alaska Bear

REPORTING ON THE LAST FRONTIER

Jan. 13, 2009

17th Coast Guard District

Winter 2008



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# Alaska's Own Guardian

By PA3 Levi Read  
Alaska Bear Staff

The wind was howling and blowing at speeds of up to 60 knots. The sea was rumbling and slapping against a black hulled vessel. The wind sprayed ocean water along with rain into the faces of the crew aboard the Coast Guard Cutter Woodrush, a 180-foot sea-going buoy tender. The crew was staring into the face of a storm because that's what Guardians do.

These Guardians were responding to a 'mayday' call.

(see **GUARDIAN** page 18)



photo courtesy of BM1 Ricky Johanson

*Seaman Ricky Johanson rides aboard one of the Coast Guard Cutter Woodrush's rigid hull inflatable boats while on patrol in Southeast Alaska in 1987. Johanson has served his entire 21-year Coast Guard career in Alaska.*

## Coast Guard lends helping hand, builds playground on Kodiak

By PA1 Sara Francis  
Alaska Bear Staff

Members of the Coast Guard Aids to Navigation Team in Kodiak and Integrated Support Command Kodiak volunteered their time to improve the playground at Kodiak Island Borough School District's Peterson Elementary in mid-October.

The school coordinated through Cmdr. Sam Jordan, the comptroller at

Integrated Support Command Kodiak and the Coast Guard appointed representative to the Kodiak Island Borough School District Board to facilitate the project.

"The principal of Peterson Elementary School, Ms. Beth Coal, asked if there were any units or personnel interested in doing a community out-reach project," said Jordan. "There was a need for help with the building and installation of a "jungle gym" for the developmental pre-

school and kindergarten children. The existing playground was built for larger children"

Chief Boatswain's Mate James Brumley, the officer-in-charge of Aids to Navigation Team Kodiak, already interested in community service projects, eagerly volunteered to assist with the project.

Jordan and the eight members of the Aids to Navigation Team met with Coal and a representative from

(see **PLAYGROUND** page 7)

# Alaska Bear

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Is there an event you want covered for the Alaska Bear? Do you have an opinion to be heard? Does your unit have anything newsworthy to report? If so, we want to hear from you, call 907-463-2065.

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## Managing Alaska's tumultuous tides

By Lt. Cmdr. Steven Orren  
District 17 Chaplain

As the Alaska Bear begins a new milestone in its publication, I wanted to add the chaplain's perspective to our dynamics in Alaska.

As you might have guessed the weather here in Alaska is very dynamic. From cold and windy, to just grey and misty it has an effect on all of us. The weather can affect your mood, eating habits and your health. Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD) is real but can be helped through exercise, healthy eating habits (vitamin D) and light therapy. Sometimes it helps to just talk to a good friend about how you are feeling or lifting them to God in prayer. However you might be feeling, please feel free to talk to EAP or me about how we can help when you are down.

Another dynamic tide here in Alaska is the economic tide. Even though we might not feel the same impact as that in the "Lower 48", we have felt it since arriving here. Everything is expensive. The fact that we pay at least a dollar more for a gallon of gas than those in the "Lower 48" shows we know what an economic tide is.

When I first arrived in Alaska I was shocked at the price of everything but now it is normal. How do we fight this tide from overwhelming us? Well, the easiest way is to budget. Everyone has a budget but few have the discipline to live inside the freedom of a reasonable budget. If you spend less than you make, you are rich. However, if you spend more than you make, you are poor or just in debt. It is difficult but there is freedom by living in a reasonable budget.

Well here are two of the dynamic Alaskan tides you might feel this time of year. May God bless you through the highs and lows to know who is in charge of all the tides of life. Merry Christmas and Happy New Year.

Blessings,  
Chaplain Orren

## Alaska Bear Online Video Features

[Click below images to watch full stories](#)



### *Santa to the Villages*

KODIAK, Alaska - Volunteers with the Santa to the villages program handed out gifts to children throughout December 2008.



### *Senior's Holiday Dinner*

JUNEAU, Alaska - The 35th Annual Juneau Senior Citizen Holiday Dinner was held at the Alaska Native Brotherhood Hall on Dec. 14, 2008.

# Operation Salliq 2008: The Coast Guard Arctic Initiative



By Rear Adm. Gene Brooks  
District 17 Commander

During the summer of 2008 the Coast Guard pushed forward to develop Arctic Domain Awareness, to test our existing platforms, assets, and competencies in the Arctic environment, and to document future requirements to provide maritime safety, security, and stewardship in the opening Arctic. Consistent with the guiding principle of “Do No Harm” to Native Alaskan culture and subsistence, all operations were coordinated with, and enhanced by, engagement with the people of the North. By fall 2008 Coast Guard assets and capabilities completed their Arctic deployments and work began on building the requirements deck for future Arctic operations.

Outreach to and engagement with Native Alaskans was absolutely imperative for safe operations and was an integral component of senior-leadership operational risk management (ORM) decision-making. Effective, culturally-sensitive engagement,

employing a strategy based on respect, humility, and non-confrontation, allowed us to take advantage of Native Alaskan experience gained through thousands of years of triumphs and tragedies. The strategy of employing the Coast Guard diversity philosophy externally, to support field operations, is counter-intuitive to historical federal governmental business practices and traditional western perspective and relationship processes—but it worked very well, due in large part to the efforts of Mr. Joel Casto, the Seventeenth District Native Liaison.

Our first step was to begin the development of Arctic Domain Awareness. We defined ADA as Maritime Domain Awareness (MDA) + or MDA within the Arctic context. When MDA tells us that a given ship with a given crew and a given cargo is at a specific place, transiting from a certain port to another port—we know what that means. We understand the context. We understand the risks. In the Arctic we do not know the context. We do not know the risks. Developing ADA means that we need MDA but we also must understand the homeland security context, the risks that a certain vessel poses to the maritime community and infrastructure, the Arctic environment and Native Alaskan culture and subsistence lifestyle.

Because traditional sensors are very limited in the Arctic we began building ADA the old-fashioned way, with the Mark 1 Mod 0 “eyeball” from Coast Guard Air Station Kodiak C-130s. We began bi-weekly flights during the shipping season and began building our expertise. Because the C-130s were capa-

ble of doing more than marine surveillance, we used the flights to carry scientists, interagency partners, press, and others with interest in the Arctic. A flight over the geographic North Pole flight was one of our early Arctic efforts, teaching us the capabilities and challenges required to operate in the polar domain.

But it wasn’t just C-130s. through engagement with the Canadian Coast Guard and Canada’s Joint Task Force North in Yellowknife, we began intelligence sharing with Canada, enhancing the awareness of both countries. Our Canadian partnership has strengthened to the point that we are full partners in our Arctic initiatives.

The observed maritime activity in the region was at or slightly above anticipated levels. While this maritime activity must be characterized as “low” by continental United States standards, there are several key points. First, there were two instances of minimal ice-strengthened industry vessels (a total of six vessels) being beset in late summer ice west of Barrow. This demonstrates the potential for significant search and rescue and marine environmental protection activity.

Second, each village had several (6-10) small personal vessels (less than 30-ft in length) engaged in subsistence hunting (typically pursuing marine mammals). These vessels would range upwards of 90 miles out to sea with little to no personal protective gear.

Third, multiple (10-20) resupply vessels routinely transit Western Alaska and the U. S. Arctic to provide goods and services to re-

(see *SALLIQ* page 4)

*(SALLIQ from page 3)*

gional villages and the western Canadian Arctic.

Fourth, current technology provides insufficient sea ice awareness for all assets other than icebreakers. Small pieces of sea ice (personal vehicle size) are often missed by current technology. While inconsequential for icebreakers, this sea ice represents a significant hazard for the remainder of the Coast Guard's surface resource portfolio. "Open water" in the ice forecast does not mean the sea is ice free, it means less than 1/10th ice coverage. The 1/10th that is ice poses serious hazards to vessels not designed or equipped to operate in ice.

Our second major effort was to employ the Coast Guard Cutter Polar Sea in a multi-mission role. Following negotiations with the National Science Foundation, Polar Sea conducted both Spring and Fall patrols into the Arctic, conducting full multi-mission operations including fisheries boardings in the Bering Sea, HH-65 and HH-60 flight operations, small boat operations, and oil skimmer exercises off Nome. While maintaining their ice skills at high latitudes, the Polar Sea provided maritime homeland security and search and rescue response capability. Her patrols were coordinated with the Whaling Commission to ensure no conflicts existed with native subsistence activities. Concurrently the Coast Guard Cutter Healy continued Arctic science operations for the National Science Foundation with two Arctic deployments, working very successfully most of the summer with the Canadian Coast Guard Ship (CCGS) Louis S. St-Laurent, Canada's premier icebreaker.

Our third effort was to resurrect the historical tradition of deploying

our buoy tenders to the Arctic. The Coast Guard's relationship with the remote native villages of Northern Alaska dates back to the days of the Revenue Cutter Service. The maritime heritage and history of these villages provide a commonality with the Coast Guard cutter fleet that inherently serves as a foundation for our outreach and shared interest in the safety and protection of the region. In furtherance of that goal, the Coast Guard Cutters SPAR and Hickory conducted Waterways Analysis & Management Studies (WAMS) of Arctic Alaska, querying local mariners and evaluating the aids to navigation needs in the region. SPAR deployed to the North from 22 August to 14 September, conducting aids to navigation (ATON) servicing, WAMS, and local engagement at Kaktovik, Barrow, Wainwright, Point Lay, Point Hope, Kivalina, Kotzebue, and Little Diomedea. SPAR also supported the Coast Guard Cutter Hamilton with an Arctic Search and Rescue exercise that tested our capabilities to respond in the region. CGC Hickory deployed north from 24 September to 3 October, conducting ATON servicing in Wales, Unalakleet, and Kuskokwim Bay and conducting WAMS in Nome, the Bering Strait and Golovnin Bay. Both tenders did an outstanding job in presenting the Coast Guard to Northern and Western Alaska, and in the future, D17's goal is to send the same cutter to the region every year to continue to build upon the positive relationships that have been established with Arctic Alaska villages.

Our fourth effort was to insert a tailored force package into Barrow, Alaska. The idea was to forward deploy helicopters and small boats to the North Slope and to use them as we would use them in Southern Alaska, in places like Sitka, Juneau,

or Ketchikan. Air Stations Kodiak and San Francisco provided HH-65s and crews; D17 provided two RB-S small boats and crews; CAMSPAC and PACAREA provided a Transportable Communications Center and watchstanders. A joint D17-Sector Anchorage command and control element was led by a D17 commander and a Sector executive officer, supported by the D17 tribal liaison officer. We learned some things. First, there are "summer storms" in Barrow in August that can reduce the temperatures into the 20s with zero visibility in snow. Second, if the wind blows from the north for a week, the sea ice will come down and jam the beach for a week preventing all boat operations. Third, consultation and integration with local people and their resources and infrastructure were invaluable.

The unpredictability of sea ice, beach erosion (all small boats are beach launched) and "normal" sea state in the U. S. Arctic render the Coast Guard's current portfolio of small boats ineffective for safe operations. Initial indications are that if mission requirements indicate a need for shore supported boat operations, a beach deployable boat that is ice resistant and has good heavy weather sea keeping capability will be required.

The vast distances, predominant icing conditions and scarcity of aviation fuel render the Coast Guard's SRR aircraft (HH-65) ineffective for operations on the North Slope. If utilizing shore based helicopters for Coast Guard operations in the U.S. Arctic, a longer range, medium to heavy lift helicopter will be required.

The lack of communications networks (to include VHF and UHF) limited resources to operating within 60 miles of the forward-deployed

*(see SALLIQ page 5)*

(*SALLIQ* from page 4)

Tactical Communications Center. High-frequency is unreliable for low flying aircraft in the U.S. Arctic and as demonstrated by the C-130 patrol to the North Pole, HF is highly ineffective at extreme latitudes. Regional NGOs that operate assets rely on satellite based communications (generally non-voice satellite based position tracking).

Our fifth effort was to deploy Maritime Safety and Security Team Anchorage and two district RB-S small boats to Prudhoe Bay, Alaska for a conceptual security exercise. We experienced the same small boat, communications, and infrastructure challenges that we experienced in Barrow. In sum, our HH-65 helicopters were too small and our RB-S small boats were too large. Ice and beach conditions inhibited boat operations in both sites.

The boat/helicopter challenges in Barrow and Prudhoe Bay forced us to push the Hamilton into the Arctic to test a 378-foot High-Endurance Cutter in summer conditions. Threading her way through the sea ice, The Commanding Officer, Capt. Vincent Delaurentis and the Hamilton became the first 378 to deploy to the Arctic and proved that cutter-based aircraft and boats could compensate for the ashore limitations. Because the ship could move, the lack of helo legs wasn't as critical and they could always find a place to launch a boat. Based on the environmental and infrastructure challenges in the U.S.

Arctic, the maritime component (icebreakers and ice-hardened cutters, with embarked helicopters) will be critical to fielding an integrated and flexible force package in the region and operating effectively for any extended period of time, at least in the near to mid-range future. The



photo courtesy of Joel Casto

***Cmdr. Joe Losciuto, Sector Anchorage deputy commander, left, Coast Guard Auxiliarist Dean Terencio, center, and Rear Admiral Gene Brooks, District 17 commander, stand near the beach on Kotzebue Sound during a visit to the Arctic in 2008.***

SAREX with SPAR proved that ice-strengthened patrol cutters are the best way to provide seasonal maritime homeland security, SAR, and marine environmental response to the Arctic.

During one of our early visits to Barrow community leaders asked us not to come up there and “start writing a bunch of tickets.” They knew that none of their boats were compliant with our boating safety requirements and other agencies often began with the “ticket” approach. We decided to go forward with our District Boating Safety Team comprised of one person from D17 recreational

boating safety staff and members of the Coast Guard Auxiliary, our volunteer civilian component, because they teach boating safety courses in Southern Alaska. When I presented this idea to the Auxiliary, they embraced it but pointed out that we didn't know how the Northern people used their boats and we would have to engage them, learn their boating practices, and then adapt our courses to their experience. The team noted they could not even purchase a personal flotation device in Barrow or the surrounding villages.

In a joint effort with the Alaska State Boating Administrator, the District recreational boating safety staff, Commodore Robinson and the Auxiliary went forward with a substantial engagement program across Northern and Western Alaska, visit-

ing the communities of Barrow, Savoonga, Point Lay, Nuiqsut, Wainwright, Point Hope, Wales, Unalakleet, Nome, Kotzebue, and Kaktovik. In every town and village our Auxiliarists, primarily Dean and Nanci Terencio and Sandy Mazen, did an outstanding job of adapting our programs in culturally acceptable ways, always enhancing boating safety. Many elders and members of the communities suggested evening town meetings to further enhance boating safety outreach. The team also found that visits to the villages during the school year would be an effective

(see *SALLIQ* page 7)

# *Making a difference; one child at a time*

By PA3 Levi Read  
Alaska Bear Staff

Everybody on this earth has the ethical responsibility to make the world a better place. How is this accomplished? The way to a better world is one community at a time. Each community is only as strong as its weakest link. Parents want their children to succeed and most will do anything within their power to make that happen. Parents need help in this venture whether it comes from a school teacher, church leader, neighbor or a Big Brother Big Sister. We all have an opportunity to be an example to the youth of this world.

Therefore, the Seventeenth Coast Guard District and the Juneau School District have agreed to form a partnership to increase connectedness, resiliency and academic, social and life skills of Juneau school students through professionally supported mentoring relationships supervised and administered by Big Brothers Big Sisters, Juneau Office.

Coast Guardsmen who volunteer with Big Brothers Big Sisters are put through an extensive background check to ensure that the new relationship will be safe and rewarding for everyone involved. The volunteers can do their part through one of two programs; the school program or the community program.

The school program allows mentoring time at school between the volunteer adults and the youth within the program. Each mentor involved spends a minimum of one hour weekly with their assigned child. The time is spent doing normal everyday activities, which range from going over school work to playing with the children at recess.

Lt. Cmdr. Gary Koehler, of the Inspections and Investigations branch for the Seventeenth Coast Guard District, has been involved with this program for approximately eight months.

"I don't push education on him, but I give him someone to talk to and just hang out with. Sometimes we read, sometimes we play kickball," said Koehler. "It is a rewarding experience to bring a positive influence into a child's life."

The community program is much more wide ranged with the mentoring program being spent within the community. Again the mentor spends several hours with the



## **Big Brothers Big Sisters**

*Little Moments. Big Magic.™*

child two to four times a month. The activities in this program are much the same as the school program, but allows for more creativity and possibly more time between the mentor and child.

Petty Officer 2nd Class Joseph Baxter, a Boatswain's Mate on the Coast Guard Cutter Liberty, homeported in Auke Bay, Alaska, explained as a Coast Guardsman, it can sometimes be difficult to fulfill obligations to Big Brothers Big Sisters while attached to an operational unit but the beauty with the community program is that I can decide when to spend time with my 'Little Brother.'

During their time together Baxter and his 'Little Brother' have gone to the rifle range, archery range, hunting, fishing, camping, swimming and biking.

There are 216 kids in Juneau that are part of the Big Brothers Big Sisters program. Most of these kids have been matched to a mentoring 'Big Brother or Big Sister' including 12 youth who have been matched with a Coast Guardsmen. Four other Coast Guardsmen are waiting to be matched with a 'Little.' The Coast Guardsmen may mentor only six percent of the Juneau children within the program, but the stories and feedback provided by those involved prove the partnership has been a great success not only for the children but also for the adults.

"I have been a 'Big Brother' for almost two years now and absolutely love the program. Though I have children of my own, I felt like I am able to make a big difference in a less fortunate child's life, said Lt.j.g. Brett Sprenger. My particular 'Little Brother' came from a home where midway through last school year he lost his

(see **BROTHERS** page 7)

*(PLAYGROUND from page 1)*

the maintenance department Oct. 11, 2008.

"We got started around 8 a.m.," said Jordan. "The eight person crew from the Aids to Navigation Team got started right away and hauled out the jungle gym equipment, dug holes and completed the installation by about 4 p.m."

The concrete footings were poured early the following week enabling Peterson Elementary to officially open it up for use by the children that Wednesday.

"It's been a real hit so far with

the children," said Jordan. "I give all the credit for the completion of this project to the crew of the Aids to Navigation Team. With winter coming fast and the ground getting harder by the day, the project definitely wouldn't have gotten done had it not been for their hard work, high energy level, enthusiasm and construction know how. 🐾



photo courtesy of ANT Kodiak

**Members of Aids to Navigation Team Kodiak and ISC Kodiak help build a playground in Oc-**

*(BROTHERS from page 6)*

mother. I was able to be there for the young man, provide comfort and cheer him up. It was nice to know that though this little guy lost his mother, I was still able to make him laugh on occasion."

Sometimes these mentorship's turn into lifelong friendships, one of those stories belongs to Lt. Todd Wimmer, formerly of the Coast Guard Civil Engineering Unit in Juneau and currently attending

graduate school at the University of Colorado, who made such an impact in his mentorship with his assigned little brother Ernie, he and his mother and sister drove from Alaska to Colorado to attend Wimmer's wedding.

A study performed by Public/Private Ventures, a Philadelphia-based national research organization showed kids involved with Big Brothers Big Sisters of America are 46 percent less likely to begin using illegal drugs; 27 percent less likely to begin using alcohol; 52 percent less

likely to skip school and 37 percent less likely to skip a class. The study also showed that the kids were more confident of their performance in schoolwork.

Can we change the world? Well, we can certainly do our part within our community. As I try to change the world, and as my fellow Guardians try to change the world one youth at a time, maybe just maybe, we can change the world together. 🐾

*(SALLIQ from page 5)*

way of reaching all the school age children to promote boating safety.

Last, Arctic logistics were challenging. The existing infrastructure in the U.S. Arctic is insufficient to support prolonged or seasonal Coast Guard operations. Thirty-seven Coasties in Barrow completely consumed their infrastructure. Any and all items not part of the support kit forward deployed with Coast Guard resources require 18-24 hours (minimum) lead time to acquire and

transport to theater. Due to the resource redundancy required for self-rescue, the loss of one asset (aircraft, small boat, etc.) rendered the entire asset class Not Mission Capable. Non-governmental berthing and messing in the U. S. Arctic is insufficient to support prolonged or seasonal Coast Guard operations. When considering the levels of material required to be forward deployed to the U.S. Arctic; a typical summer day across the North Slope of Alaska is comparable to a typical winter day in the Pacific Northwest.

In sum, Operation Salliq 2008 was an outstanding success because we were able to test the current Coast Guard asset inventory under Arctic conditions while providing maritime safety, security, and stewardship. We learned that the helicopters we sent were too small and our boats were too big. Next summer we'll look to larger helicopters, smaller boats, all supported by offshore cutters and continued Native Alaskan engagement. 🐾

# Historic rescue defies all odds: 42 saved

By PA3 Richard Brahm  
Alaska Bear Staff

“Mayday, mayday, mayday. United States Coast Guard, this is the Alaska Ranger! Our position is 5-3-5-3 decimal 4 north, 1-6-9-5-8 west. We are flooding, taking on water in our rudder room.”

As this mayday call raced across the Bering Sea on Easter morning bound for the radio room of any Coast Guard rescue center within reach, 47 fishermen on the Alaska Ranger were donning their survival gear for what would play out as one of the largest and most dramatic rescue cases the Coast Guard has ever responded to.

The Coast Guard Cutter Munro, a 378-foot high endurance cutter was on patrol near the fishing fleet in the Bering Sea. With the wind at its back, the Munro was strategically positioned to quickly respond to any vessels in distress.

The Alaska Ranger was 120 miles west of Dutch Harbor and enduring blistering gale force winds, temperatures below freezing and swelling seas between 10 and 20 feet. No one had any idea the Alaska Ranger was crashing through pack ice and would soon begin to sink.

Without warning frigid water began rushing into the ship's rudder room, quickly

filling adjoining spaces, disabling the ship. The Alaska Ranger had lost all steering and power and was now at the mercy of the unforgiving Bering Sea.

The captain of the Alaska Ranger made two calls that would help save the lives of nearly everyone aboard. The first call was for the crew to get into their survival suits, deploy as many life rafts as they could and abandon ship. The second was the mayday

*“The concern in the voice on the other end of the radio was palpable and filled our aircraft with the looming dread that what we were heading for was very real.” -Lt. Brian McLaughlin*

call to the Coast Guard.

On the Munro it was just after 3 a.m. Most of the crew were sound asleep as the Bering Sea rocked their cutter in some of the same waves and howling winds the Alaska Ranger was enduring. Red lights illuminated the hallways. The hum of the diesel engines created a soothing lullaby for those aboard.

The calm was abruptly broken by the crackle of the intercom system as the booming voice of the commanding officer, Capt. Craig Lloyd, rang out among the empty

halls and quiet rooms. The crew quickly began to roll out of their racks, listening intently as Lloyd explained the situation to them.

As soon as the Munro got the mayday from the Alaska Ranger they immediately pointed the ship toward their position. The officer of the deck called down to the engine room to get both turbines online and started plotting the fastest course toward the Alaska Rangers position, 120 miles west of Dutch Harbor.

Soon crew members were rushing about the cutter, scurrying through tight corridors, going up and down ladder wells. All of them trying to get to their assigned areas, as well as trying to prepare for what was to come.

The crew kicked into action and began making preparations for taking on survivors by converting the mess deck to a treatment center, heating blankets in ovens, breaking out survival gear, and getting the flight deck ready to launch their HH-65 Dolphin helicopter. The crew would also prepare to recover survivors from both the Dolphin and the HH-60 Jayhawk stationed on St. Paul, a small island in the middle of the Bering Sea.

The crew down in the engine room had already started tweaking the engines pushing them for everything they had. The Munro would soon reach

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*(RESCUE from page 8)*

speeds unheard of aboard a Coast Guard high-endurance cutter.

Meanwhile, hundreds of miles away in the opposite direction, the air crew from St. Paul awoke to the sound of a ringing phone. Pilots and crew bolted to the locker rooms to get dressed-out in all of their survival gear. Ground support jumped in vehicles and sped over to the hanger where they started prepping the helicopter for flight.

The air crew got as much last minute information as they could before getting into a truck and driving over to the hanger.

Once the Jayhawk was airborne, the crew in the back, consisting of Petty Officer 2nd Class Robert DeBolt and Petty Officer 2nd Class O'Brien Hollow, began reaching out on their radio to the Alaska Ranger crew. The two pilots, Lt. Brian McLaughlin and Lt. Steve Bonn both slide their night vision goggles into place from on top of their helmets.

The night was pitch black, the only thing visible for the small helicopter crew, between the barrages of snow, was the inky blackness of the vast ocean

“As the helicopter approached the Alaska Ranger, before it had sunk, we were able to reach them on the radio about 30 miles north of their position,” said McLaughlin. “The concern in the voice on the other end of the radio was palpable and filled our aircraft

with the looming dread that what we were heading for was very real. The good news was that everyone had been able to don their survival suits before abandoning ship. They stated there were only seven people left aboard and they were getting ready to get into the rafts”.

At first, as the air crew approached the scene, they saw a few strobe lights blinking on the distant horizon and figured those were the rafts. As they got a little closer and there was a fourth light, fifth, sixth, and so on, it quickly became apparent that there were dozens of people in the water.



photo by AST3 Byron Cross  
***MH-60 Jayhawk helicopter crew, from left to right, Lt. Brian McLaughlin, aircraft commander, Lt. Steve Bonn, co-pilot, Petty Officer 2nd Class O'Brien Hollow, rescue swimmer, and Petty Officer 2nd Class Robert Debolt, flight mechanic.***

The first set of strobe lights they flew over was a pair of survivors in survival suits waving at them. As the pilots flew overhead they tried to get a look at the whole situation and as they climbed a little higher they saw the ocean flashing at them over a

mile-long stretch, yet the Alaska Ranger was nowhere to be found.

The crew made some split second decisions and decided to hoist the people that were not in rafts first.

“We just picked a spot and began hoisting,” said McLaughlin. “I called the one raft that had a handheld radio and explained to them what we were doing while the rest of my crew was busy getting the rescue swimmer out the door.”

That’s were Hollow’s job with the air crew really came into play. One of Hollow’s responsibilities as a rescue swimmer was to go down into the freezing water, beneath the unrelenting rotor wash and sea swells to pluck people out of the cold, unforgiving Bering Sea.

Hollow slid up to the edge of the helicopter’s open door as snow and sea spray swirled around him. DeBolt and Hollow had done this many times. They had practiced constantly and today was the day all that training came to fruition.

DeBolt checked Hollow’s gear one last time before lowering him down to the freezing waters below.

Hollow knew that it would take to long to get each hypothermic survivor into a basket so he decided to grab each survivor without disconnecting from the helicopter.

“In the next 50 minutes or so, we would pick 12 people out of the water and stack them in the cabin, while trying

*(see RESCUE page 10)*

*(RESCUE from page 9)*

to coordinate an offload with their sister ship, the Alaskan Warrior, as it was only five miles away,” McLaughlin said.

The crew of the helicopter had planned on dropping the survivors on the Alaska Warrior, but there was a problem. The crew of the helicopter was unaware of all of the Alaska Warriors fishing gear and rigging on the decks when they coordinated the original drop off. Once the helicopter made it to the Alaska Warrior they knew they wouldn't be able to get the survivors safely down to the boat.

The crew also had another problem. They were running low on fuel and would soon reach their limit.

They had two choices. Turn around and fly to Dutch Harbor, drop off the survivors and hope they could get fuel there or they could fly to the Coast Guard Cutter Munro.

Not only could they drop the survivors off on the



photo by PA3 Richard Brahm  
*A life raft from the fishing vessel Alaska Ranger floats in the Bering Sea after survivors were rescued by the Coast Guard. Many survivors were unable to reach rafts but survived because of survival suits.*

Munro, where they could be cared for, but the Munro could also do an in-flight helicopter refuel for them.

The crew made the call. They would fly to the Munro, drop off the survivors and refuel and head straight back out to save more lives.

The corpsmen aboard the Munro and a huge team of people had been working hard for the last couple of hours to turn the mess deck in to a triage and hypothermia treatment center for the survivors in preparation for the rescued survivors. This was all done on top of launching the Munro's helicopter just shortly after the Jayhawk crew picked up their last survivor.

About 20 minutes later McLaughlin's crew arrived at the Munro and began lowering the survivors down to the deck as fast as they could.

The crewmembers of the Munro watched and listened in the early dawn, with barely enough light to see, as the whir of the hoist cable lowered the survivor's down one at a time. The crew knew the longer it took them to get these people inside, the longer the other survivors in the water had to wait.

One by one the survivors were led into the make-shift triage center where they were given heated blankets and some of the Munro crews own personal clothes.

“The speed and safety with which the Munro's crew transferred the survivors out of the basket and got ready for the next one was phenomenal, said McLaughlin. “During the

hoisting, I ran through some fuel calculations and realized if we didn't fuel at that time, our on-scene time would have been about 10 minutes at best”.

The crew of the Munro quickly switched from grabbing survivors to beginning the in-flight refueling operations.

DeBolt lowered the hoist cable to the awaiting crew of the Munro. They quickly attached a fuel line and watched as it was hoisted back into the helicopter and attached.

Meanwhile the crew of the Dolphin helicopter was starting to find survivors and pick them up. The Dolphin is much smaller than its Jayhawk counter-part and with its crew of four; there isn't a lot of room.

The crew of the Dolphin realized they could only fit four survivors in addition to the crew. Rescue swimmer Petty Officer 3rd Class Abram Heller knew what he had to do.

The survivors had been in the water for hours and almost all of them were suffering from varied stages of hypothermia. The longer they stayed in the water the worse off they would be.

Heller was lowered down into the water where he quickly began to untangle five survivors from floating debris and nets. One by one they were hoisted up to the helicopter by Petty Officer 2nd Class Alfred Musgrave, the flight mechanic for the Dolphin. Musgrave realized that they could only fit one more survivor or Heller into the helicopter.

*(see RESCUE page 11)*

*(RESCUE from page 10)*

Heller knew the situation was dangerous. The seas still swelled to a massive 20 feet and the wind was still whipping freezing cold ocean spray in excess of 30 miles per hour. Heller decided to stay in the water with the remaining survivors and provide support to any other survivors.

As Musgrave hoisted another survivor into the helicopter the crew knew they had to go back to the Munro and re-fuel. If they didn't hurry they wouldn't have enough fuel to make it back to the Munro.

Back on the Munro, the Jayhawk was just a little over halfway through re-fueling, when the Dolphin crew called the Munro and told them they were returning and critically low on fuel. It would take almost 20 minutes to get to the Munro and they only had 36 minutes until they ran out of fuel...completely.

McLaughlin and Bonn both knew what was at stake and did some quick calculations aboard the helicopter. They had enough fuel to go back on scene and search for more survivors, which would also allow the Dolphin crew to come in and get the fuel they needed so badly.

DeBolt disconnected the fuel line, reattached it to the hoist cable and lowered it back down to crewmen on the deck of the Munro.

The crew of the Munro watched as the crew from the Jayhawk sped away into the darkness toward the remaining



photo courtesy of the Coast Guard Cutter Munro  
*A survivor of the Alaska Ranger sinking is taken aboard the Coast Guard Cutter Munro after being hoisted from the Bering Sea by a MH-60 Jayhawk helicopter from Air Station Kodiak. Survivors were picked up by helicopter and lowered to the flight deck of the Munro where crewmembers were waiting to help to help the hypothermic victims with warm blankets and fresh supplies.*

survivors.

As Bonn navigated back out into the endless night heading toward the scene he couldn't help but think about the survivors left out in the unforgiving ocean's eerie darkness and how they could be their only hope.

The Alaska Ranger's sister ship, the Alaska Warrior, had picked up 22 survivors by the time the Jayhawk got back on scene.

The crew of the Jayhawk recovered an additional four crewmembers, as well as Heller.

They continued to search until they were getting low on fuel. Bonn turned the helicopter back toward the Munro to offload the survivors and re-fuel one last time for the flight

back to St. Paul Island.

The crews of the Jayhawk, Dolphin and Munro said it was by far the most large-scale Coast Guard operation that they have ever been involved with, employing five aircraft, seven crews, a Coast Guard cutter and good Samaritans.

The Coast Guard helped save 42 lives that night and although the Alaska Ranger had many complex situations, that is also how the Coast Guard trains.

Even though the Alaska Ranger was a once in a life time case for the Coast Guard, it's not expected to be the last. For that reason the Coast Guard stands ready to help those in need who venture into the Bering or any sea. 🐾

# Working aids to navigation in the Arctic

By PA1 Sara Francis  
Alaska Bear Staff

In response to the increased interest above the Arctic Circle, the Coast Guard has begun to reexamine the need for Coast Guard maintained aids to navigation.

To that end, the Coast Guard Cutter Hickory was dispatched from Homer, Alaska, to conduct a waterways assessment and conduct outreach with the indigenous people of the area from September 15 to mid-October. The crew learned quickly that the current aids to navigation in the area mean a lot to the people who live there.

The Coast Guard Cutter Hickory is a 225-foot ocean-going buoy tender. The most recent class of buoy tenders was designed for a primary mission of tending aids to navigation. However, the demands on the Coast Guard require it to serve a multi-mission function in search and rescue, law enforcement, fisheries enforcement and the support of an oil spill recovery system which is kept on board.

The crew conducted an Arctic Domain Awareness patrol and what is officially known as a waterways analysis management survey (WAMS).

In the mid-1980s at the height of the construction on the North Slope, aids to navigation existed along the Yukon Delta and as far north as Nome, Alaska. There also used to be several radio beacon towers along the North Slope that were decommissioned in the mid-1990s. These aids were designed to safely guide marine traffic to and from the North Slope.

After the major construction was completed, the amount of marine traffic steeply declined.

During the course of the Hickory's evaluation of the Kuskokwim Delta Eek Channel on the north side of Bristol Bay, Alaska, the crew determined at least 55 aids would be needed to mark a safe transit path on the river approaches to Bethel, Alaska.

The Hickory crew took many soundings using the transducers on the hulls of the Hickory's small boats. Water salinity, temperature and the state of the tides were all taken into account when conducting this bathymetric work. This data also filled in some navigation unknowns for the crew because the charts have outdated information and are of in-

sufficient detail to navigate safely.

"Vessels larger than Hickory transit this region on local knowledge and a depth sounder," said Cmdr. Gregory Tlapa, commanding officer of the Coast Guard Cutter Hickory. "Without a chart of the area, that knowledge is very valuable around here."

"Most of the charts we have are limited," said Tlapa. "Many of the newest charts we have are from the '40s and '50s when the DEW [Distance Early Warning] Line was established. Beyond that we have admiralty charts made by the British. Some of those areas that literally have graphic depictions of sea monsters on them are areas where we don't know what is there."

(see *ATON* page 13)



official U.S. Coast Guard photo

*The Coast Guard Cutter Hickory is a 225-foot sea-going buoy tender with a crew of 40 enlisted and seven officers. The crew is divided into three departments who work together to form team Hickory. The cutter's primary mission is aids to navigation and most of the aids are around the Kenai Peninsula, hence the nickname "The Kenai Keeper".*

(*ATON* from page 12)

When in port the crew spent some time with the locals. Their route took them from Homer to Kodiak, Alaska, where they took on gear and several new crewmembers from Aids to navigation Team Kodiak. From there, they visited small towns throughout Alaska like Shismaref, Savoonga, Wales, Unalakleet, Little Diomed Island and Nome before returning home about 30 days later.

In Savoonga, on St. Lawrence Island, the ship's corpsman spent time conducting a professional exchange with the local medical professional. Simultaneously, a Coast Guard Auxiliarist from Juneau, Sandy Mazen, conducted boating safety outreach in the school with Coastie. Coastie is a three foot motorized lifeboat with a personality of its own. Mazen encountered a lot of interest from the locals regarding women serving in the Coast Guard. He also has ties to the village of Wales. He was born in Nome but several decades ago his parents were school teachers in Wales.

The Hickory crew assisted the villagers of Wales considerably by transferring some very valuable hazardous materials from Savoonga. The material? Harpoon propellant. Both villages practice a subsistence lifestyle and in Wales they had been without propellant for over a year.

"The whaling captains of both villages worked out a deal," said Tlapa. "But the propellant is considered HAZMAT and they couldn't transfer it themselves. We were only too glad to be of service."

During the crew's time in Wales they held a barbeque and played warrior ball, similar to dodge ball, with the village teenagers. The whole vil-

lage gathered to watch.

The crew also put their skill into rebuilding Cape Prince of Wales light, a two-day job. It is the western most aid in the United States located at the chokepoint of the Bering Strait. For the people of Wales it marks more than just the shore, it marks their way home. The light stands 40 to 50 feet high, much higher than the



surrounding land formations or any structure. The natives use the light as a landmark to guide their skiffs and ATVs home. They also use the platform to scan the horizon for returning parties and game to hunt.

While transiting further north the crew received a request from the people who reside on Little Diomed Island. Their helicopter had been inoperable for several weeks. Though they had not originally planned to stop in Little Diomed, the ship served as a taxi and transported 11 people to Wales for medical treatment.

In Unalakleet, on Norton Sound, the crew spent the night and rebuilt a red and white day board. The day board is lit and stands almost 50 feet high on an eight-foot by eight-foot footprint.

Before leaving the area the crew dropped a small boat in the water and

attempted to access the middle entrance to the Yukon River. The crew confirmed that the waterway was no longer passable due to shifting and un-navigable mud flats. They were looking for a tower structure aid 12 to 15 miles into the tidal flat that was originally installed by helicopter.

The small boat crew was able to run 15 to 20 miles from the ship but the water in the area was too shallow. They were working off the most recent chart of the area, an admiralty chart. The depth measurements and channel markings have long since changed. Local mariners in the area confirmed the Yukon River is only accessible from the north and south entrances not the west.

In the Kuskokwim Delta, on the north end of Bristol Bay, the crew removed nine seasonal aids that will be returned to their station in June. Then they headed to Dutch Harbor for a port call and to put the Kuskokwim aids in winter storage at the buoy yard there. On the way home to Homer they worked a few additional aids in the Shumagin Islands.

"During our trip we did respond to one search and rescue case," said Tlapa.

The case occurred off the south end of Kodiak Island. They were hailed by a disabled fishing vessel drifting towards shoal water. They took the vessel in tow and delivered it safely to the closet port of refuge, Lazy Bay, about 40 miles away.

"We planned this trip for months," said Tlapa. "Half those due to transfer this summer worked out deals with the detailers and their new units to be allowed to stay until the voyage was complete."

The SPAR out of Kodiak is scheduled to do the trip next fall and the Hickory is expected to return in the fall of 2010. 🐾

# Moving North

## Examining the Coast Guard's role in the Arctic Domain

By PA1 Kurt Fredrickson  
Alaska Bear Staff

More than 100 years ago revenue cutters plied Arctic waters, enforcing law on an unforgiving and foreign maritime frontier. While their presence in the Arctic gradually faded into history, it was merely the first chapter in the Coast Guard's Arctic story. A century later the service is finding a reinstated course on the ice laden seas of the far north.

Although the Coast Guard has had a scientific presence in the Arctic for decades, it wasn't until recently that the need to examine other missions emerged. In 2007 two events focused world attention on the changing Arctic: the announcement that the Northwest Passage was open for the first time in modern history and the planting of a Russian flag on the seabed at the North Pole. Since then all eyes have shifted north, as have the missions of the Coast Guard.

At the center of the debate over the region are eight Arctic nations; the United States, Canada, Russia, Norway, Denmark, Iceland, Sweden and Finland. All of which have an interest in the ownership of resources in the region. And while the Arctic is a topic of concern for the entire international community, the Coast Guard is finding itself on the front lines as the responsible maritime presence in U.S. Arctic waters.

Although the Coast Guard has a

high level of maritime domain awareness within southern Alaska and the lower 48 states, it has limited experience and knowledge regarding the Arctic as a maritime domain. In recognizing this lack of knowledge, a mission to examine all aspects of the Arctic is underway.

In 2007 the Coast Guard began actively gathering information about the Arctic through a series of bi-monthly flights above the Arctic Circle. These missions, designed to see whom, if anyone was operating in Arctic waters, would provide initial insight into the maritime activities of the far north.

"We began to find ships in the Chukchi Sea that we didn't expect," explained Rear Adm. Gene Brooks, commander of the Seventeenth Coast Guard District in Alaska. "The Canadians tell us that 107 ships successfully transited the Northwest Passage last year and about 300 ships worked the Russian Arctic... The ships are coming already."

In the first season HC-130 Hercules airplanes from Air Station Kodiak, Alaska, flew nearly 80 patrol hours before winter weather in December froze the sea to ship traffic. Patrols resumed in May 2008 and

(see **ARCTIC** on page 15)



photo by PA1 Kurt Fredrickson  
*Petty Officer 2nd Class Christopher Bybee, a machinery technician from Coast Guard Station Juneau, works aboard a 25-foot response boat off the coast of Barrow, Alaska, July 31, 2008, as part of the Coast Guard's first Arctic exercise which began July 27, 2008.*

(*ARCTIC* from page 14)

continued until winter once again ended flights. The missions which originate in Kodiak cover thousands of miles of Alaskan coastline from Nome to the Canadian border near Dead Horse on the North Slope and can last more than 12 hours.

But it was in 2008 that the Coast Guard made it's most organized and committed step toward understanding Arctic operations through a series of exercises and deployments.

"We simply don't know what we need to be doing and how effective we can be with the tools we have today," said Cmdr. Michael Trimpert, chief of Coast Guard incident management for the Seventeenth District. "We need to answer those questions before we start crafting long term resource requirements and mission requirements and start building anything."

To assist in getting those answers, last year the Coast Guard established a forward operating location for helicopter and small boat operations, undertook the first deployment of a high-endurance cutter above the arctic circle and engaged in the first maritime law enforcement mission in the Arctic by a Coast Guard ice breaker. These events add to those already in place which include annual aids to navigation mission to the Arctic by the Kodiak-based Coast Guard Cutter SPAR, science missions by Coast Guard ice-breakers and the new Arctic Domain Awareness flights.

At the northernmost point of the United States lies the small native community of Barrow, Alaska. This traditional whaling community was chosen as the location for the Coast Guard's first forward operating location in the Arctic. In July a contin-



photo by PA3 Walter Shinn

***Lt. Bill Sportsman and Lt. Jerred Williams fly a Coast Guard Air Station Kodiak HC-130 Hercules airplane over permafrost above the Arctic Circle enroute to Barrow, Alaska August 7, 2008 The air crew flew along the shoreline of the North Slope conducting coastal erosion surveys. The Coast Guard has been testing the capabilities of assets and communications in the harsh environment of the north since October 2007 trying to determine the best way to patrol the increasing waters in the Arctic.***

gent of about 30 individuals deployed to Barrow for two weeks to identify obstacles, capabilities and requirements to forward deploy assets and support staff above the Arctic Circle.

Experts in aviation, surface operations, communications and boating safety were selected to take the Coast Guard's first step into the Arctic. Two HH-65 Dolphin helicopters, one from Air Station Kodiak and another from Air Station San Francisco, were flown to Barrow over the course of several days. Additionally challenging was the delivery of two 25-foot response boats, and boat crews from Valdez, Ketchikan and Juneau, Alaska. They were flown to Barrow and Prudhoe Bay, Alaska by C-130s to examine the challenges of Arctic surface operations. Because

Barrow is completely isolated, flights from Kodiak delivered all the remaining support staff, equipment and the communications trailer and team from Point Reyes, Calif.

The deployment to Barrow saw many firsts shrouded with uncertainty. As Cmdr. Michelle Webber, supervisor of forward operating location Barrow pointed out, the goal was to get the boats in the water and fly at least once despite the anticipated obstacles.

Based on the outcome of the two weeks in Barrow she noted that the exercise was a successful test of what does and doesn't work in the Arctic. During their time on the North Slope air crews faced extreme distances, communication issues and extreme weather, but were surpris-

(see *ARCTIC* page 16)

(*ARCTIC* from page 15)

ingly able to fly most days and even participated in a search and rescue mission. As for the boats, severe pack ice limited their ability to get underway. But on days when the boats could splash, coxswains learned that charts were old and inaccurate, the Arctic Ocean's silty water disagrees with the boats engines and the knowledge of local mariners is an invaluable resource. And while aircraft and boats did their best to operate in the Arctic extremes, the communication team from Point Reyes was hunkered down in a small white trailer surrounded by antennas trying to talk with the rest of the Coast Guard thousands of miles to the south. Although some means of communicating proved fruitless, others worked quite well. And while the exercise was ongoing, Coast Guard Auxiliarists flew to remote villages on the North Slope to spread the message of boating safety.

Although the land based operations examined many of the Coast Guard's missions, an equal amount of activity was occurring offshore.



photo by PA3 Richard Brahm

***The 225-foot Coast Guard Cutter SPAR sits off the coast of Barrow, Alaska in August 2008 as it prepares to assist the Coast Guard Cutter Hamilton perform a search and rescue drill for the first time in the Arctic.***



photo by PA3 Michael Anderson

***The Canadian Coast Guard Ship Louis S. St-Laurent maneuvers into position to moor up with the U.S. Coast Guard Cutter Healy during a cooperative science mission to the Arctic Ocean between the U.S. and Canada, Sept. 25, 2008.***

Although often shrouded by fog, the Coast Guard Icebreaker Healy loomed off Barrow like a mysterious red island for several days. However, most of its time was spent far offshore. In March the Healy left its home port of Seattle for the first part of Arctic West Summer 2008, a scientific mission supporting research by the National Science Foundation and the North Pacific Research Board. During these missions scientists aboard Healy studied the ecological processes as ice retreats through the Bering Sea. Scientists conducted numerous studies to learn more about how marine microorganisms, plants and animals will be affected by ongoing changes in the Arctic.

Further missions included ocean bottom mapping of the Arctic, a mostly uncharted region, and seabed dredging. Samples taken may reveal

important information on the boundaries of the North American continental shelf.

This spring also saw the first multi-mission deployment of an icebreaker into the Bering Sea. The Polar Sea deployed to the Arctic and conducted scientific research as well as fisheries boarding's. These law enforcement fisheries boardings were the first conducted from an icebreaker; a ship traditionally limited to scientific missions. But as ice recedes and fishing boats move north, the Polar Sea in this case has taken on a multi-mission role. The northern areas, which still have large areas of ice in the summer, are generally avoided by ships without ice reinforced hulls, such as Coast Guard high-endurance cutters.

Although heading into the Arctic is not unusual for icebreakers by

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(from *ARCTIC* page 16)

any means, 2008 was a year of firsts for high-endurance cutters. In July the Seattle based 378-foot Coast Guard Cutter Mellon expanded its patrol area and passed through the Bering Strait and crossed the Arctic Circle to conduct the full spectrum of Coast Guard missions. Those missions include ensuring the safety of the fishing fleet in one of the most dangerous, yet rich fishing grounds in the world, guarding against foreign fishing vessel incursions into U.S. waters and that fishermen adhere to established regulations that protect sustainable fisheries.

In August the high-endurance Cutter Hamilton entered the Arctic Ocean, to continue the history that the Revenue Cutter Service began more than 100 years ago. Dispatched to enforce maritime safety and security, the Hamilton was the first high-endurance cutter to enter the Arctic Ocean and the Chukchi and Beaufort Seas. For two weeks the Hamilton patrolled unfamiliar waters. Additionally, the cutter conducted a search and rescue exercise off Barrow with the 225-foot sea-going buoy tender SPAR. In an area of increasing ship traffic the Coast Guard is examining the possibility of an

Arctic mass casualty rescue. The reality of a mass casualty rescue occurred in Sept. 2007 when a tourist filled cruise ship struck ice and sank near Antarctica.

As ice continues to recede, nearly every mission the Coast Guard has will need to be conducted in the Arctic to some extent. The increase of ecotourism awakens the need for search and rescue capability and the increasing commercial traffic creates the potential for pollution incidents. Native communities, once isolated, will be facing new challenges tied to the sea, and the Arctic nations of the world will continue to vie for the resources in the region.

Looking back at this summer, Brooks explained that the wealth of data collected on Coast Guard operations in the Arctic is not specifically for the service, but the American



photo by PA3 Richard Brahm

***Crew members of the Coast Guard Cutter Hamilton stand a vigilant watch on the bridge. The Coast Guard Cutter Hamilton is the first high endurance cutter to be in Arctic waters for the Coast Guard with the sole mission of homeland security.***

people, Congress and those making decisions on the future of Coast Guard Arctic involvement. Like the Revenue Cutter Service, the Coast Guard will not make decisions on the policy or the direction taken by the nation in the Arctic. They will however have the traditional responsibility for enforcing law in this new maritime domain.

“The real question is what does America want to do in the Arctic,” Brooks said. “Were giving them the data to make that decision.”



photo by PA3 Richard Brahm

***The Coast Guard Cutter Hamilton sails across the Arctic Ocean toward Barrow, Alaska, Aug. 26, 2008.***

(*GUARDIAN* from page 1)

A boat was taking on water somewhere in Sitka Sound, Alaska. The Coast Guard had lost communication with the caller so the crew stared into the vast darkness fighting the stinging spray they felt upon their faces. For one of the crewmen, Seaman Ricky Johanson, that night aboard the Woodrush was just the beginning of his Coast Guard career and that night left a definite impression.

"I remember standing amidships on the boat deck staring into the darkness searching for anything in distress with my elbow hanging over the edge. I was approximately 15 feet above the water line when the ship rolled off one of the waves and as the ship rolled I could have reached down and touched the water," said Boatswain Mate 1st Class Ricky Johanson, 1st Lieutenant at Coast Guard Station Juneau, 21 years later.

The Woodrush's crew searched that entire stormy night and never found the distressed boat. Although during the search, at approximately midnight, a life raft was found and a rescue swimmer was deployed into the water to investigate the raft.

"I can still remember the anticipation of watching the swimmer swim to the raft and the empty disheartening feeling I felt as the swimmer shook his head notifying the rest of the crew of negative findings," said Johanson.

Johanson has served his entire 21-year Coast Guard career in Alaska. Johanson is a native Alaskan by birth and by heart. He was born in Juneau and raised in Hoonah, a small native village approximately 40 miles southwest of his birthplace. He is a member of the Tlingit Tribe.

On July 5, 1987 Ricky Johanson signed his enlistment papers and offi-



photo courtesy of BM1 Ricky Johanson  
***Seaman Recruit Ricky Johanson at Training Center Cape May, N.J., in 1987. Johanson has served his entire Coast Guard career in Alaska.***

cially entered the United States Coast Guard. He was one of the last recruits who signed up in Juneau before the recruiting office moved to Anchorage. He wanted his first assignment to be aboard the Coast Guard Cutter Basswood homeported in Guam. Since that didn't work out, he decided to come home to Alaska straight out of boot camp and now the rest is history.

He has been involved in hundreds of search and rescue cases and various other missions in and around Alaskan waters. Although Johanson was serving in Alaska during the time of arguably the biggest and most devastating marine casualty in Alaskan history, the Exxon Valdez oil spill, he did not play a significant role in the clean up efforts because the Woodrush had just arrived in Bellingham, Wash., for a dry-dock and repair period.

During his time aboard the Woodrush from 1987-1990 he responded to the 1989 Cape Decision Lighthouse fire that damaged the tram dock, boat house, hoist house, paint shed and helipad. The crew of the Woodrush transported firefighters and other rescue volunteers from the nearby town of Petersburg and helped in rigging fire fighting equipment. The lighthouse and surrounding area has since been repaired and is still in operation.

After his stint aboard the Woodrush, Johanson transferred to Station Ketchikan where he advanced to boatswain mate 3rd class. He served in Ketchikan from 1990-1991. He was involved in a search and rescue case in Clarence Strait where sea cucumber divers resurfaced after a diving excursion and found their fishing vessel, Bandito, stuck in heavy seas and taking on water. The divers called for help and Station Ketchikan responded in their 41-foot Utility Boat and started towing the Bandito.

The shortest route to safety was to cross Clarence Strait heading west. The problem was that the storm was coming from the north and crossing the strait would have put the rescuers in a perilous position being beam to, to the seas. The decision was made to follow the Tug Venture and its fuel barges up through Clarence Strait using the barges as a shield from the weather. The storm was strong enough to carry breaking waves clear over the barges and onto the bow of the 41-foot rescue boat. The rescue took approximately 11 hours to complete.

His next assigned unit was Air Station Sitka as a boatswain mate. This was described by Johanson as being forgotten by the Coast Guard detailer. Apparently other boatswain mate 3rd classes stationed in Ketchi-

(see *GUARDIAN* on page 19)

(*GUARDIAN* from page 18)

kan were receiving orders but not Johanson. He called his detailer and the only billet available was a position at Air Station Sitka. He served there from 1991-1994.

His main job at the air station was to drive the practice boat for the helicopters during rescue exercises.

After his time at Air Station Sitka, Johanson says he was forgotten by the detailer again and this time was given the choice to serve time in the Lower 48 or to work at the Integrated Support Command Kodiak firehouse. He chose Kodiak and was stationed there as a boatswain mate 2nd class from 1994-1998. During his time at the firehouse, he was involved in fighting a major fire that broke out at the Star of Kodiak cannery. The cannery is housed inside a beached ship. The April 4, 1997 fire resulted in several ammonia releases estimated at 100 pounds each. Firefighters including Johanson fought the fire for approximately 18 hours.

"At this point I chose to stay in Alaska and serve at the fire station in Kodiak because it kept me and my family in Alaska," said Johanson. "I wanted my kids to go to school and finish school in Alaska."

Johanson said he hasn't had a problem with staying in Alaska because he thinks most other Coast Guardsmen don't want to come to Alaska and the detailers know he likes it up here and wants to stay up here. In fact he always mentioned on his dream sheet that he was from Alaska and didn't mind the gloomy weather or the small remote towns.

After his tour in Kodiak he was stationed in Juneau at the small boat station from 1998-2002. Here he qualified as a boat coxswain, on the 41-foot Utility Boat, 47-foot Motor Lifeboat and the 25-foot Response

Boat Small. One of his biggest cases as a qualified coxswain was in response to the cruise ship Spirit of '98 grounding in Tracy Arm, approximately 40 miles southeast of Juneau. The cruise ship had hit a submerged object and began to take on water uncontrollably. The cruise ship's 93 passengers were evacuated and Air Station Sitka supplied six dewatering pumps but the pumps were not able to reach a void beneath the crew's quarters and in spaces aft of the engine room.

The small boat crew rigged a P-1 pump into a thru-hull fitting that Machinery Technician 2nd Class Ryan Savage discovered during the inspection of the vessel after Johanson noticed the cruise ship was taking on more water than the pumps could keep up with.

Johanson said upon arriving in Tracy Arm he noticed an accommodation ladder hanging from the cruise ship that was approximately a foot above the water. He noticed later that the bottom step of the ladder was underneath the water. This told him that even though the crew of the Spirit of '98 thought the flooding was under control, it was not. They needed to investigate and inspect the cruise ship to find where the flooding was coming from. Johanson and his crew were on scene with the Spirit of '98



photo courtesy of BMI Ricky Johanson  
***Seaman Ricky Johanson works on a navigational shore-aid in Southeast Alaska. Johanson has worked with two aids to navigation units during his 21-year Coast Guard career.***

for 36 hours. Johanson received the Coast Guard Commendation Medal, awarded to those who distinguish themselves by heroic or meritorious achievement or service, for his involvement in this case.

After four years in Juneau, he transferred back to an Aids to navigation vessel homeported in Cordova. He was aboard Coast Guard Cutter Sycamore, a 225-foot sea-going buoy tender, from 2002-2005. Johanson said his time aboard the Sycamore was fairly quiet in terms of search

(see *GUARDIAN* on page 20)

(*GUARDIAN* from page 19)

and rescue operations. Although he did have a frightening experience while aboard the Sycamore. The Sycamore, while transiting through Snow Pass, between Petersburg and Wrangell, was struck by the wooden hulled vessel Renigad. He said that the crew of the Sycamore lowered their small boats to assist the damaged vessel. The Sycamore only received minor dents and scratches on its hull near the Coast Guard stripe.

After his tour aboard the Sycamore, he returned to Station Juneau where he is currently serving. During this tour in Juneau he has responded to several more cruise ship groundings, including the Empress of the

North in 2007 and the Spirit of Glacier Bay in July 2008. During the Spirit of Glacier Bay rescue, the rescue crew, led by Johanson, tossed a line across to the vessel and held the cruise ship's bow steady as the tide came up. A strong current coming from a nearby river made the refloating of the cruise ship a dangerous operation. Had the bow been caught in the current the cruise ship could have been pushed into a nearby glacier.

Johanson is scheduled to be in Juneau until summer 2010. He is currently a petty officer first class and has plans of advancing to chief petty officer prior to transferring or retiring. Either way he wants the trend of serving in Alaska to continue and plans on retiring in Alaska.

"I have a good understanding of the area, and I understand the resources available," said Johanson. "I have a lot of experiences to draw from during my service here in Alaska because until I returned to Station Juneau I had never done the same job twice."

He thinks the aids to navigation parts of his career have been the most rewarding because he has worked on aids in areas ranging from Dixon Entrance north covering all of Southeast Alaska, Prince William Sound and Cook Inlet in South Central Alaska and Dutch Harbor in the Aleutian Chain. "We accomplished a variety of things from fixing buoys, building and fixing shore-aid towers and still participating in other Coast Guard missions like search and rescue," said Johanson.

"There is a certain satisfaction in every job in the Coast Guard but with aids to navigation you are more proactive and can

visually see work accomplished but with search and rescue there is a lot of waiting for something to happen," explained Johanson.

"The best thing about my career would have to be the relationships I have been able to have with my shipmates," said Johanson. He said he doesn't run into many of his old shipmates because he has stayed here in Alaska and they have moved on usually to the Lower 48. But when he does, it has been fun to rehash the old memories.

"We built great relationships with each other because it was routine to work 12 to 16 hour days and we suffered through it together," said Johanson.

"I live and work in the most beautiful place on earth. I probably take it for granted, even though it often provides awe inspiring moments, because I grew up here and have lived here all my life," said Johanson. "The thing that gets my attention is the constant reminders of how huge Alaska is because of the transit times from one place to another it can take hours or even days.

"The most important thing that has happened to him from his time with the Coast Guard is the understanding he has provided to the Tlingit Tribe and the public in general about what the Coast Guard is and what it represents.

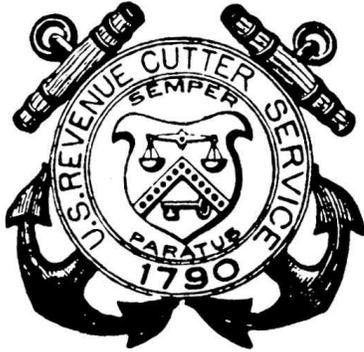
Johanson explained that even though his family and friends in Hoonah didn't have much knowledge about the Coast Guard they still supported his choice in serving, but now that one of their own has spent the last 20 years with the Coast Guard they have a better understanding of who we are as Guardians. 🐾



photo courtesy of BM1 Ricky Johanson  
***Seaman Ricky Johanson is hoisted up from an aids to navigation platform in Southeast Alaska by an HH-3F Pelican helicopter.***

# Chief's mess plays key role in service modernization

By Master Chief Petty Officer Terence Vanderwerf  
D17 Command Master Chief, East



In my office hangs a sepia photograph from the Revenue Cutter Service days titled the "The Black Gang" taken sometime in 1910 in Dutch Harbor, Alaska. The photo is of twelve disheveled engineers posing in front of an unknown revenue cutter.

Looking at that image, I see the past where our service once was and, to some degree, the challenges of today. A lot has changed since that picture was taken and, as in the past, our service is changing, "modernizing" for the future. The Chief's Mess will be the executors of this sea change by flowing information up and down the chain of command and providing deck plate leadership during implementation. The success of modernization will depend on it.

Knowing that there will be challenges, the Chief's Mess will need to provide honest feedback on modernization plans and how those plans take shape. One of the first challenges will be clarification of what modernization really means in transforming the Coast Guard. The workforce will be relying on the Chief's Mess to explain the changes, give examples and describe changes yet to come. In doing so, the Chief's Mess will provide an informed assessment up and down the organization.

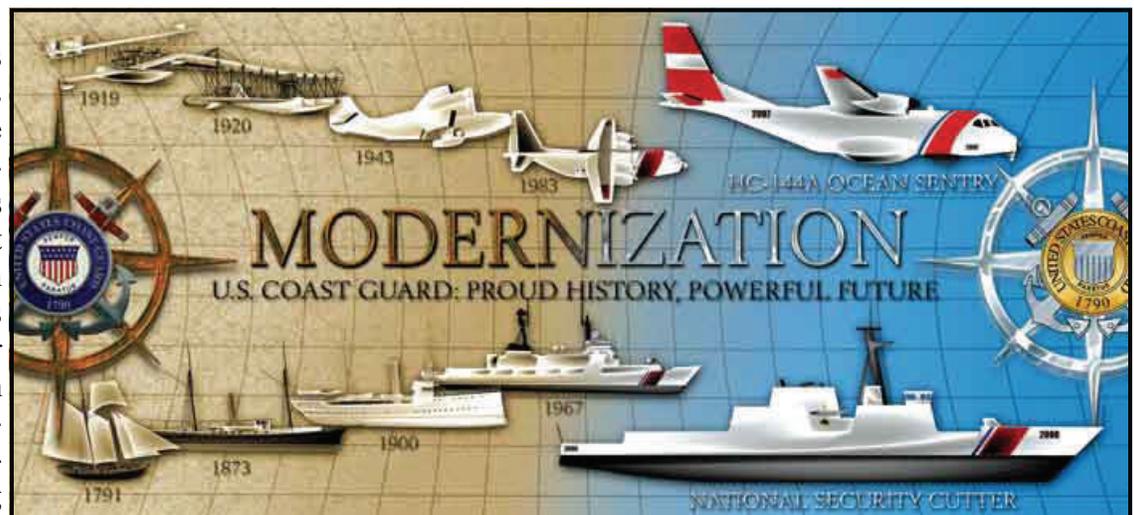
The Coast Guard has gone through many changes since being transferred to the Department of Homeland Security. One of the challenges associated with change is that it creates enormous anxiety in our people. The Chief's Mess will need to provide senior leadership information on how modernization is impacting the workforce. The Commandant is quoted as saying

"The strategic modernization is about looking into the future and repositioning the Coast Guard to best serve the Nation far into the 21st Century." The Chief's Mess must help foster a strategic overview, while preventing modernization-fatigue in our people.

Active communication is one of the guiding principles for the Chief's Mess. Three years ago, the Coast Guard stood up thirty-five sectors. After that decision was made there seemed to be unending discussion on whether this was the right course of action. Unlike in the case of sectors, suggestions regarding the modernization process need to be timely, offered with proper decorum and in the right venue. The Chief's Mess must provide their honest input to our leaders and willingly support whatever decision is ultimately made.

Survivability of any organization lies within its ability to change and anticipate future needs. Our service has gone through many changes since the early years of the Revenue Cutter Service, and like our predecessors the service is continuing to change to meet the needs of the future. The Chief's Mess role in the success of Coast Guard modernization is three fold: we must trust in and support senior leadership and provide educated feedback on modernization efforts; maintain vigilance on the welfare of the workforce and prevent modernization-fatigue; and give straightforward advice for changes to the modernization process.

The Chief's of the Mess will guide our members into the future, while preserving the best traditions of the past and their experience, loyalty and wisdom will help guarantee its success. 🐾



# A reunion a decade in the making

By PA3 Walter Shinn  
Alaska Bear Staff

Petty Officer 1st Class Stephen Morrison, an intelligence specialist in the Coast Guard, held hands with his wife Harmonie and their 9-year-old son, Brendan, as they stood on the pier in silence looking at the Coast Guard Cutter Acushnet for the first time in 10 years.

After meeting in Eureka, Calif., Stephen and Harmonie exchanged vows on the fantail during Independence Day July 1998. A few weeks later they left together for a Coast Guard training school and would not see the Acushnet together again until Sept. 23, 2008.

Stephen stood on the pier, turned towards his family and said to them in excitement, "well let's go see it."

"Request permission to come aboard," Stephen said as he saluted the quarterdeck watch stander while walking across the brow from the pier to the Acushnet. His family walked just behind him. Once they walked across the pier they walked on to the foc'sle of the Acushnet and gathered around the Acushnet emblem as they looked around the bow.

Walking across the brow of the Acushnet and standing on the bow of the Acushnet brought back memories from 10 years ago for both Stephen and Harmonie.

"I felt old, but it did feel like seeing an old friend. Showing my son my first ship and the place where we were married," Stephen said. "My wife and I know, that if not for being stationed in Juneau, Alaska, we would have never seen the Acushnet again."

"It was a little surreal," Harmonie said while she was standing on the bow looking back toward the Acushnet. "I wasn't sure we would ever see the Acushnet, let alone be able to take our son on board."

Stephen and Harmonie walked on the starboard side of the Acushnet and eventually made their way through several narrow ladder wells onto the bridge. While they stood on the bridge, a Acushnet crew member guided



Photo courtesy of IS1 Stephen Morrison

***Petty Officer 1st Class Stephen Morrison stands with his wife, Harmonie, along with friends and family that celebrated their wedding ceremony on the fantail of the Coast Guard Cutter Acushnet in 1998. On Sept. 23, 2008 the Morrisons reunited with the Acushnet for the first time in 10 years.***

them through the cutter. They walked around the bridge and realized not much had changed other than the addition of new electronic systems. Stephen and his wife gathered around the wooden authenticated helm. As Stephen recalled taking the helm of the cutter while underway, his wife Harmonie, who brought a wedding book filled with photos, showed Stephen a picture of them standing on the fantail.

They began leaving the bridge and walked back outside into the pouring rain to walk down several narrow ladder wells toward the fantail.

During the walk back, Stephen recalled meeting his wife for the first time at a roller hockey rink in Eureka, Calif. He was playing hockey with a few of his friends two days before Christmas in 1997. Harmonie spotted him because he was wearing her favorite team shirt. She was quite amazed because three days earlier she had sat on Santa Clause's lap wishing for a hockey player. She approached him and they began talking about hockey. They began seeing each other more, dating and eventu-

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*(REUNION from page 22)*

ally sending letters while Stephen was underway in the Bering Sea on the Acushnet. When he got back from the Bering Sea patrol he asked Harmonie to marry him.

The idea of getting married on the fantail was not their original plan. They were set on heading to the courthouse to receive their certificate. His friend mentioned of getting married on the fantail while the Acushnet was in "Full Dress," which means it is lined with flags from the bow to the top of the mast and to the stern of the ship on the 4th of July. There are only two required days a year a ship must be in "Full Dress" and this was one of them. Stephen's shipmates would help set up an area for family and friends to stand.

"It felt like everything just fell into place," Stephen said. "When you have great shipmates helping you out, it makes everything easy. Even the night before the wedding, I was relaxed and not freaking out."

When Stephen, Harmonie and Brendan made it down the last narrow ladder well, they realized it was an experience of a lifetime. Stephen and his wife held hands and didn't let go of each other the entire time they stood on the fantail. Even the pouring rain could not dim the bright smiles they had on each others face. They walked over and stood at the area where they exchanged vows, then looked into their photo album pointing to the same location they were standing.

The Morrison family made their way off the Acushnet. As they stood on the bow of the Acushnet and remembered the great memories. Stephen and Harmonie kissed each other before departing the Acushnet one last time. 🐾



photos by PA3 Walter Shinn

**ABOVE:** Petty Officer 1st Class Stephen Morrison, his wife Harmonie and son Brendan stand on the starboard deck of the Coast Guard Cutter Acushnet. The Coast Guard Cutter Acushnet visited Juneau for three days before beginning a Bering Sea patrol Sept. 23, 2008. The brief visit enabled the Morrison family to see the Acushnet for the first time since exchanging vows in July of 1998.



**LEFT:** Petty Officer 1st Class Stephen Morrison and his wife Harmonie hold a wedding album on the bridge of the Coast Guard Cutter Acushnet. The Acushnet is 64 years old and holds the title "Queen of the Fleet," which designates it as the oldest cutter in the fleet.