Nov 2010

The Shade Tree

CGC OAK (WLB-211)

Dry Dock 2010
Oil Decontamination

Rad Productions

Top Right: OAK's stern stripped bare of paint

Center: SN Fernandez beside the propeller.

Lower Right: Gulf oil found inside installed systems.

Top Left: OAK sits high and mighty in dry dock.

Lower Left: CO & XO examine work progress.

For many, it felt like the Deepwater Horizon incident and ensuing oil spill recovery operation in the Gulf would never end for the crew of OAK. After a challenging month of Aids to Navigation work in and around Puerto Rico; OAK was diverted to the Gulf of Mexico just as the ship was approaching Miami for a northward turn home. The mobilization effort of Federal assets to the oil spill was massive yet OAK stood out among the crowd by developing unprecedented methods for tracking, targeting, and skimming oil slicks in mass quantities.

The leaking oil well may have been successfully capped, but OAK suffered an oil saturated hull and oil contaminated deck equipment. Once finally home after two months in the Gulf, the crew kept engaged with maintenance projects while a dry dock location was chosen.

Detyen's Ship Yard, just one mile up the river from OAK's home pier may have been a prime location for the 26 day dry dock period but the crew worked long hours to accomplish as much as possible in the short time frame.

Top Left: ENS Volkman & SN Fernandez learn to handle the fire hose properly.
Lower Left: DC2 Croteau instructs proper hose team skills for firefighting.

Top Right: MK1 Ponder teaches pipe patching.
Lower Right: BM3 Thompson poses with our mascot.

Knowing is Half the Battle...

Above: Rob Kecken, EM3

Rob Kecken of Punta Gorda, Florida is a radio ham and everyone knows it; he is a hobby enthusiast electronics guru with a need to ride radio waves. “My vehicle looks like a porcupine with all the antennae on it!”, he stated. It’s rare to find a more unique shipmate than EM3 Kecken, especially with these fun facts. Did you know he came within four feet of being struck by lightning? Or maybe you heard how he’s been passed on the highway by three separate high speed car chases?

Kecken has worked some admittedly gnarly jobs prior to the Coast Guard like a hotel reception clerk and dock worker to name a few. “My worst job was in High School mowing lawns in the Florida heat”, he added. Why did he choose the Coast Guard? “ In my senior year of high school I had no idea about college or degrees but after shopping around other services I really identified with the Coast Guard’s core missions and values,” he said.

What was originally supposed to be a four year adventure has turned into nine years and counting. “My goal is to pursue 20 plus years and shoot for making Chief or go the CWO route, you never know what could happen,” he stated. After serving his Country, Kecken intends to try his hand at either EMS or law enforcement work.

Kecken not only loves electronics and communications equipment but enjoys music and playing the drums. He is really looking forward to getting involved with volunteer work and community projects.

“Charleston is one of the best places for a single person to live and work in and I’m just now getting my feet wet”, he said.

Here is ***The Situation...***

Above: Nicholas Viscariello, FN

At 24 years old, homegrown in Houston, Texas- Nicholas Viscariello is ready for action. Whether he's enjoying his favorite hobby of racing cars on the track or surfing the high seas– Viscariello does it fast. Revered in High School as an athlete, he insists that his scholarly skills were great but competing in Math-lete marathons would be pushing it. Viscariello contemplated joining the Coast Guard after hearing what a friend had done while deployed in Haiti. After comparing the other services he settled on the CG due to the appeal of saving lives and helping those in need. "I joined the CG to mature, travel, and work with good people", he added.

This man's name may whip up some stereotypes in your mind; mainly anything with a meat sauce and ending in *"-oli"*. And it's all true, his grandparents, cousins, aunts, and even an *Uncle Tony* are living in the vine ripened mother land of Italy. His father came to the U.S. as a teenager, got into the restaurant business and the rest is history. Viscariello intends to complete his military service commitment and then complete his business management degree to join the family's Italian restaurant ventures.

Our new shipmate enjoys traveling and has explored Italy, Mexico, Hawaii, and many regions of the U.S. To complement his love of surfing Viscariello challenged the waves of Costa Rica with a healthy complement of jungle touring and offshore fishing.

"I'm lucky to get a buoy tender out of boot camp, everybody tells me how great it is, so I'm really excited.", Viscariello said with a smile.

Rescue at Sea...

OAK Saves 7 Lives

At midnight on November 9th, 2010 OAK steamed northward 40 nm off the east coast of Florida heading towards Charleston, SC. The seas were high with waves of 8 to 10 feet and winds blowing at 15 to 20 knots. The radar was clear of any contacts and OAK's engines droned smoothly driving her at a steady pace into an ocean of inky black night.

For the watch standers on OAK's bridge it was an average start to what would become an extraordinary time for the crew. The lookouts scanned the horizon, the Officer of the Deck verified progress along the track line and everyone enjoyed light sporadic conversation. Then an eerie sound rang out, "At around 1205 I thought I heard multiple faint voices yelling over off the starboard side of the ship", ENS English stated.

HS2 Hammock

Confirming the noise with two other watch standers solidified that something was not only wrong but needed immediate action. With a quick hand on the throttle the OOD called for the captain and pulled back power. HS2 Hammock commented, "I was in the rack asleep until I heard over the speaker 'Captain to the bridge!', then the engines got quiet, I didn't know what was happening– my first thought was that we were sinking!".

ENS English

Once the crew was roused from a deep sleep and mustered on the mess deck, word of a possible man overboard situation became everyone's worst fear and concern. While simultaneously turning around, completing checklists, and ensuring accountability– it was determined that each member of OAK's crew was safe and secure onboard. " I never thought it was a man overboard, we had heard multiple distant yells over the side, I had a gut feeling that something was still wrong", English stated.

LCDR Peter Niles, OAK's Commanding Officer, ordered the ship to continue back tracking, calculate set and drift, and search the spot where the strange noises were reported. With the entire crew accounted for, there was nothing to lose and everything to gain. Spotlights ignited and binoculars scanned the seas as the ship neared the location, a mounting level of suspense hung in the cold November night. And then with one controlled sweep of the searchlight's beam a raft was spotted being tossed atop the waves.

SN Fernandez

OAK's crew immediately sprung into a search and rescue mode by positioning the ship to lower the small boat, firing parachute flares, and providing a flurry of calls to Sector Jacksonville with situation updates. During those surreal moments the only thing that mattered were the lives of seven individuals, a family in fact; nationality and circumstances had no place in the equation.

Once the seven were loaded into the small boat efforts turned to staging the buoy deck to receive personnel and deliver medical treatment. "Surreal is a good word for how it felt waiting for the small boat to come alongside; medically I was expecting worst case scenarios", Hammock said. OAK's Spanish interpreter, SN Fernandez, was ready for the rapid translation action that was required during the event, "I was excited to be able to use my skills, being valuable to the crew".

BM2 Andrade

The fantail was outfitted as a staging area for OAK's sea battered guests to change into dry outfits, use the restroom, hydrate, and rest while passenger transfer plans were arranged. "I focused on teaching less experienced crew members what to say, how to keep them calm, and provide all the necessary elements for dealing with migrants," BM2 Andrade commented.

The following morning two were taken for additional medical services in Cape Canaveral and five were taken by CGC PEA ISLAND; after 14 days adrift at sea and 8 of those without water, all would step on dry land alive and well once again.

Dear USCGC Oak Families,

My name is Jessica Nyby, your new Ombudsman, and I'm very excited to build relationships with the crew and families of the cutter OAK.

For those of you who don't know, An ombudsman is a volunteer that is named by the command who is the main link between the command and the families of the crew.

I understand the sometimes daunting task of packing up and moving to areas unknown to you and also appreciate the great adventures that are afforded to USCG families. I am here to assist you as much as possible as your new adventure brings you to the Charleston area!

As you can probably guess, the Oak, being a cutter, does go away from time to time. Fortunately we live in an age where technology can keep us in contact with our loved ones while they are performing their duties out to sea. While having the ability to email is wonderful, it can be very hard to be the one left behind when the Oak makes its trips. I am here to support the families in anyway I can whether it be adjusting to separation, tips on where to go for fun or even just being an open ear.

Part of my duties includes being your connection to the command as well. Anytime there are questions or concerns please bring them to me and I can take the issues to the command or possibly even help with resolutions.

In an attempt to bridge any gap between the crew, command and our families, I hope to bring people together for fun and to support the crew. If you have any ideas on ways to boost morale for both crew and families, I am all ears!

Again, welcome to our family. If there is anything I can assist you with before the move or after please feel free to contact me. It is my goal to make sure everyone has the resources they need to ensure a safe, fun and educational stint as part of the CGC Oak Family!

Sincerely yours,

Jessica Nyby
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