

Newspaper Article 2: The Coast Guard and Lake Thurmond

(Part 1)

Some have asked, "What does the Coast Guard have to do with Lake Thurmond?" Well, the answer is a bit complex. The United States Coast Guard has responsibility on all of our nation's waters. Having said that, the sheer size of our nation's waterways, compared to the relatively small number of Coast Guard people, requires the Coast Guard to concentrate its resources on the greatest needs.

That does not mean that Lake Thurmond gets no Coast Guard attention. The Coast Guard has assigned that job to its Auxiliary. But first a little explanation.

The Coast Guard is composed of four segments: Active duty, reserves, civilian employees and the Auxiliary. There are about 41,000 active duty; 8,100 reservists; 8,100 civilian employees; and 30,000 Auxiliarists.

The mission of the Coast Guard is to always be prepared (Semper Paratus) to respond to any natural or man-made maritime incident or disaster. Coast Guard activities are organized into three areas to do this job:

- Prevention
- Response (if prevention does not work)
- Logistics – consists of all personnel and assets that support prevention and response

The Auxiliary's main function is to support the active duty Coast Guard. The local Auxiliary does this, whenever tasked, by providing personnel, boats and aircraft in response to needs from Coast Guard Sector Charleston or Station Tybee. Auxiliarists also perform administrative duties, such as radio watch standing, at Coast Guard stations enabling active duty personnel to address serious on-water and in-the-air missions.

However, in the CSRA there are no active duty or reserve elements to support, so the Auxiliary gets involved in all three areas of prevention, response and logistics. Locally the Auxiliary works closely to support the state's Depts. of Natural Resources, the Corps of Engineers and various law enforcement agencies.

We do this by implementing several Coast Guard programs. First, we provide boats and aircraft, with fully trained crews, to conduct safety and security patrols, aids to navigation checks, regatta patrols and search and rescue missions. These patrols are under Coast Guard orders using our own specially inspected boats. The Coast Guard pays for fuel, some maintenance, meals and towing expenses. When under orders, Auxiliary crews are covered by Coast Guard liability and medical protection.

Second, the Auxiliary, in conjunction with the United States Power Squadrons, conducts free Vessel Safety Checks. These inspections assure the boaters that their boats meet minimal federal and state equipment requirements. Don't worry about any legal consequences if your boat doesn't pass the inspection the first time. The results are not shared with anyone besides you. If the boat fails the inspection, remedy the situation and then get re-inspected.

The third major Coast Guard program the Auxiliary manages is recreational boaters' public education. This consists of a series of boating courses, from basic to advanced, offered to you, the boating public. In the CSRA these courses are provided jointly by the Auxiliary and the Army Corps of Engineers.

Next week's article will address specifically what the local Auxiliary "Flotilla" (that's the name for the local branch of the Auxiliary) does and how you can become a part of the action.

Don't forget to consider attending our next basic boating course to be held September 27th. For details and how to enroll please contact:

(Part 2)

Last week we reviewed the Coast Guard's on-water missions for Lake Thurmond and how volunteers are needed to provide crews and boats. This week we will examine several other Coast Guard missions in the CSRA.

Boater education is a subject in great upheaval throughout the country. There is proof positive that education bearing on boater safety has a dramatic effect on safety. Most boating safety funding is provided by the federal boat gas tax and is passed on to the individual states for implementation. While each state has its own program, they all adhere to guidelines established by the National Association of Boating Law Administrators.

Boating Education is moving towards mandatory status. Some states already require a level of education before a boater can operate a boat. Many others are moving in that direction.

In addition, various other organizations, like the Coast Guard Auxiliary, conduct boating safety classes. In the CSRA we conduct a one-day course "About Boating Safety" once a month from March through September. At various times during the year, we also conduct a GPS class and more advanced boating classes such as navigation and communications.

These classes are conducted in partnership with the Army Corps of Engineers and classes are held at their Visitors' Center at the dam. If you are a boater and like to teach this is a very satisfying experience.

Another boating safety service provided by the Auxiliary is the Vessel Safety Check program. We inspect boats, with the owner's permission, to make sure it meets the minimum federal and state equipment requirements.

The Coast Guard has its own fleet of aircraft, ranging from helicopters to Falcon Jets. These aircraft respond to Search and Rescue alerts mostly on the coast and high seas.

In addition, the Coast Guard has authorized its Auxiliary to use members' personal aircraft for patrol work, logistics support and VIP transportation. (Last month we had an Admiral aboard.) Like boat patrols, the Coast Guard reimburses fuel, meals and provides a maintenance payment.

We are looking for an instrument rated pilot, with a four-place single engine aircraft to volunteer for these missions. Coast Guard Air Station Savannah is the controlling command for this activity, although your aircraft will remain stationed at its present location. In addition, we will need a co-pilot and crew members. The co-pilot can be any current pilot. While crew members with aviation experience helps, we will train crew members without experience to become radio operators and observers.

Finally, the Auxiliary, along with the Corps of Engineers, the United States Power Squadrons, county EMS services and state DNRs are in the process of establishing a marine radio net for Lake Thurmond. Once the net is operational (before next April) we will need radio watch standers to operate the radios and alert the appropriate authority to launch Search and Rescue operations. More on this subject will be in this newspaper as the system becomes a reality.