

Boating Tips

A Labor Day Story

Susan (the Admiral) and I took some time off from our hectic schedule over Labor Day weekend this year to spend some quality time in the Delta. My buddy, Dr. Arnold Goldschlager, called me with an offer we couldn't refuse: He wanted us to take his brand-new 42-foot motoryacht from Willow Berm Marina in the Delta to his yacht club (Delta Yacht Club) on the San Joaquin River. We would be his guests for the weekend and attend a "Toga" party on Saturday night. (I always wanted to do that!)

So the wife and I departed on Arnie's boat, *Avenue A*, Friday afternoon after lunch. The trip was

beautiful down to the island. We tied up and both ran for the pool as it was ripping hot that day! HA! Ahhhh... that was good! (Don't you miss that now?)

Arnie showed up in his brand-new 27-foot deep vee runabout boat with an 8.1-liter, 496 C.I. motor at about 2 p.m. I asked "Daddy" (I call him that to tick him off) if we could borrow the runabout to visit some friends. He, reluctantly, said yes and we were off!



BY KEVIN O'LEARY

We went for a cruise to Mildred Island revving the motor to 6500 rpm the whole way! (Just kidding, Arnie!) The previous Thursday, I had given a talk on boating safety at the Discovery Bay Yacht Club, so I knew the club was organizing a raft out and where it would be. They had a great location in the lee of the



Dr. Arnie Goldschlager (aka "Daddy") of the Delta Yacht Club.

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prevailing wind and were having a great time.

My contact for the raft out was one Allen Bellinghausen, Safety Officer for Discovery Bay Yacht Club. His 47-foot pilothouse motoryacht was rafted up to a brand new 65-foot Pilothouse yacht (very impressive). We came in close off their sterns and showed off the cool ride I borrowed from "Daddy." Soon after, we wished them all a happy holiday, took some pictures and took off to visit some other friends at Horse Shoe Bend.

Just by circumstance we all went home on Sunday and missed the mayhem that was about to be unleashed on the waterways of the Bay and Delta.

According to Mr. Bellinghausen, this is what happened:

"The raft out consisted of about 15 boats, all bows facing west, with 50 percent of the raft out with bow anchors and about 50 percent stern anchors. On the north end of the raft out was the 65 Pilothouse, a very large and heavy yacht. He had deployed his bow and stern anchors well before anyone else from the raft out arrived. Next came my boat, a 47 Pilothouse motoryacht; I had my bow and stern anchors out. Next to me was a 38-foot cockpit motoryacht with no ground tackle deployed, then a 30-plus-foot express named *Sas Sea* with a bow and stern anchor deployed, and then alternated along with the rest of the boats. The winds were light and out of the west. Friday, Saturday and Sunday went very well. It was Monday morning approximately 4 a.m. when all hell broke loose.



"Daddy's" toys during Labor Day celebration of Delta Yacht Club.

"I was already awake when a thud on my hull got me scrambling out of bed. What I saw when I got to the cockpit was unbelievable; we had not only broken loose, we were breaking up. The whole raft out was turning into a flying V. My first action was to start my engines, then place the starboard engine in forward; this helped to straighten out the V. This bought us some time to assess the situation. Then the 65-footer started his engines and began clearing lines at his stern, stern anchor, PWC, inflatable, etc..."

"I also looked to find my stern anchor was going toward the bow. I untied the line and walked to the bow and attempted to bring it onboard. It would not come up, not even with my windlass. As I was on the bow I noticed that except for the four boats mentioned above, the rest of the raft out was now on its own and seemed OK. The boat named *Sas Sea* was somehow at a 90-degree angle to the 38 with its stern away and facing bow to bow.

"Also, this was when I noticed

the wind, it was beyond fierce, and blowing so hard you had to yell as loud as possible so people could hear. The 65 was now ready to cast off and he did successfully, but when his bow anchor came up, my stern anchor was impaled on his chain! We were attached bow to bow by my stern anchor rode, which I ended up cutting from my bow (and not a moment too soon!).

"Then the issue was the 38-foot cockpit cruiser. The skipper of *Sas Sea* and I decided to release the 38 since it had no ground tackle (deployed). When we did that I was finally on my own. When I initially entered the raft out I put out around 150 feet of all chain connected to a Delta Plow meant for a boat one size larger than mine, so I thought since I was all alone on my own anchor all would be good. I got back to the cockpit to reassess my situation thinking the anchor was holding.

"As I was getting my bearings I looked in the water and there was Lewis, the gentleman from the 38, floating some distance off my stern.

The strange thing was that I was floating towards him; I knew my anchor was not set. Lewis was able to swim to my boat and was returned quickly to his boat via another boat in our raft out. Apparently Lewis' PWC flipped upside down tied to the stern of the 38 and he jumped in to right it. The wind-driven 38 quickly floated away and he could not keep up, and the captain of the 38 could not get to him.

"With Lewis gone off my boat, I needed to attend to my drifting anchor. My anchor controls are (only) at the bow and the anchor needed to come up. With my 'never been at the boat's helm' wife at the helm, I directed her how to put the boat in gear and gave hand signals to the direction to steer. My windlass was OK at first then it began to jam. I had to reverse the windlass direction to clear the jam then continue to bring the chain in. This happened over and over until finally the windlass jammed and the breaker snapped. WHERE IS THAT BREAKER???? I asked myself. As I scrambled back to the salon I finally got my orientation – we were being blown into the south end of Mildred. I finally found the breaker, reset it, and returned to my windlass. Again, the windlass kept jamming and the breaker blew.

"Back to the salon, then back to the bow. Now the windlass was beginning to slow and growl and the breaker blew again! I wanted to cut the chain just to end this freaking nightmare. We were getting closer and closer to the south end. On my last attempt I helped the windlass manually by using the manual crank bar. Finally the anchor was up out of the water, full of weeds, but up. I ran to the helm to find about 100 yards between the south end

and me. After motoring out some, I locked the anchor in place.

"When I returned to the helm this is when I really noticed Mildred. It was finally daylight and Mildred was a violent mess of three- to four-foot white-capped wind waves driving directly from the north. While my disaster was coming to a close, the 38 was still dealing with their own. I looked back to see the WaveRunner® had sunk and was now under the care of Vessel Assist. On the radio the owner of the 38 was calling on VHF channel 72 to ask anyone with a 38 Bayliner where



Discovery Bay Yacht Club raft out, Mildred Island.

the breaker for the windlass was. She was having the same problem I was. She did manage to get her anchor up in time.

"So there's the story. What went wrong? I have my own theory. Others have theirs. I will say one thing I believe and that is the bottom composition of Mildred seems to be changing to invasive weeds, and maybe a Delta Plow is no longer the correct anchor. This is the second time my anchor has come up full of weeds. One other thing: I will no longer use an all chain rode."

Lessons Learned

Mr. Bellinghausen shared a few lessons learned from this experience:

- ❑ Use lines that are in good con-

dition and the right size for your vessel.

- ❑ Check all anchors, chain, rode (bow and stern) for condition and correct size and be prepared to use them.

- ❑ Be sure your vessel is mechanically sound and all systems operate properly.

- ❑ Learn to tie knots properly, for example, a cleat hitch or bowline.

- ❑ Be sure your other half has a good basic knowledge of the systems onboard and can operate them.

Kevo's Tip:

Allen, I'd be honored to instruct your wife on the basics of operating your 47-foot yacht at her convenience at no charge. (Don't worry... I'll charge it back to the *Yachtsman* as a "research" expense). HA!

Seriously folks, the majority of those participating in this affair were very experienced mariners. Like most responsible mariners, they secured their vessels properly and checked the weather forecast. The raft out was closest to Stockton as far as a metro area. Unfortunately, they focused on the forecast for Stockton, which predicted 10 to 15 mph winds. This forecast was wrong! The Sacramento forecast predicted winds (out of the north) gusting to 40 mph. They got slammed. It could happen to any of us.

I agree with Mr. Bellinghausen's observations and lessons learned completely.

Does anyone else have a story to tell (with a happy ending) about Labor Day?

Be safe & happy boating!

As always, feedback is appreciated. I can be reached at 925/890-8428 or kevo@yachtsmanmagazine.com. 📧