

# CAPT'N KEVO'S

## Boating Tips

*Note to my readers: I am taking a short break from writing this column in Yachtsman. I will return in 2012.*

### Helo Rescue

arrived at Air Station San Francisco at 0945 hours, fifteen minutes ahead of schedule. I'd

been there once before so pretty much knew the basic layout of the base. They escorted me to the hangar where they keep the four



French-made MH 65 Dolphin helicopters assigned to the base.

After meeting the flight crew I changed into a set of long underwear and a "dry suit" in the locker room. It took awhile to get that sucker on, but in the end I won the match!

Next came the preflight briefing where we assessed all of the risk factors, went over the flight plan and secured all necessary equipment for the mission. I was impressed with the fact that at the end of the briefing the flight commander, LCDR Harper Phillips, asked everyone in the crew how they were "feeling" about the mission; as in, did everyone get a good night's sleep and did anyone have any personal issues that might impact the safety of the crew or the aircraft. What a good question!

After completing the necessary paperwork for the flight, all of us stepped on a scale with all of our gear on in order to get an accurate measure of the gross weight of the crew. The aircraft took on 1,000 pounds of fuel. Then we headed out to the tarmac where our ride was waiting.

I got re-familiarized with the aircraft and participated in the inspection. They made it clear that we are all in this together, so everyone must participate in the safety of the



USCGA vessel *Silver Charm* plies SF Bay waters.



From left, Kevo; LCDR Harper Phillips, Pilot; AST2 Ian Jobs, Rescue Swimmer; AMT2 Christopher Hunter, Flight Mechanic; and SN Kyle Webb, Rescue Swimmer in training.

crew and aircraft. I took my seat in the back and plugged in the internal communications system (ICS).

Next, the pilot, copilot and flight mechanic went through an exhaustive preflight checklist while the rescue swimmer helped me wrestle with my “gunner’s belt.” This is basically a strap attached to the aircraft with a sturdy belt that you buckle around your waist to keep from falling out when the door is open. (Very important!)

After reporting to and getting permission from SFO Air Traffic Control, we took off and hovered about 10 feet off the ground for a few minutes to make sure all was right with the aircraft. When the pilot was satisfied that it was safe to fly, we flew swiftly out of SFO airspace in order to not interfere with the take off of commercial aircraft.

It took about 10 minutes to reach our destination and rendezvous with a Coast Guard Auxiliary vessel waiting approximately one-half mile due south of Yerba Buena Island.

### Bio of USCGA Vessel Owners:

“I (Linda Vetter) and my husband of 37 years (Terry Blanchard) joined the U.S. Coast Guard Auxiliary about 20 years ago. We took the basic safe boating class from the Auxiliary and then joined to get in on more “free” training, and got hooked on all the things we could do to help the CG and boating public.

“Now we are both “coxswain” qualified and have been doing patrols in SF Bay area for at least 15 years. We teach safe boating classes ourselves. Our current patrol boat, *Silver Charm*, is a 33-foot all-aluminum boat we had custom built by Daigle Welding in Campbell River, BC, in 1999, on their Eaglecraft-designed hull. We wanted a good SF

Bay Auxiliary patrol boat, and she is great with a full walk-around, all in-board rails, fore and aft tow posts, and a side door we can open to pick up people in the water, etc.

“We work with CG Air Station SF MH-65 helos about twice a month doing hoists to/from our boat, standing by for rescue swimmer work, etc. We’ve picked up dozens of wind surfers/kite surfers and even persons in the water (PIWs) off of sunken or capsized vessels and have done a lot of tows over the years.

“Since we do 40-50 patrols a year and have used this boat for 12-plus years, she has a lot of good hours on her (we’re on the second set of outboard engines, now a pair of 225-horsepower Hondas with about 2200 hours on them).”

### OK... Back To The Story...

We hovered near the USCGA vessel for a few minutes in order to judge the sea/wind conditions before committing to the exercise. The flight mechanic opened the rear sliding door and pulled back the hatch on top of the door allowing the boom to swing much closer to the cockpit for use.

He motioned for me to come over to him and dangle my legs out the side of the helo. I did as instructed and all of a sudden had an epiphany: WHAT THE (HECK) AM I DOING HERE? I’M TOO OLD FOR THIS (STUFF).

I could feel the spray from the rotor wash coming off the water. The sound was deafening. The sheer power of the rotor blades whirling above made me feel rather insignificant in the scheme of things. They hooked me up to the boom and detached my gunner’s belt (in that order).

The flight mechanic gave me thumbs to ask one more time if I was



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OK with this. I responded with thumbs up and he raised me up into the clutches of that boom. (We were still getting acquainted and I wasn't sure if it liked me yet.)

There was no turning back now. They swung me out and it was me and my new best friend: the boom. As they started lowering me I got this "sinking" feeling. HA. (Couldn't resist!)

I hit the water gently and released the boom hoist shackle from my harness. Everything was in order and I gave a wave with my right arm indicating all was fine. The water was cold. The rotor wash sent water shooting into my eyes like little BBs. Facing the helo under these conditions is a challenge without a mask or goggles on.

I turned toward the USCGA vessel and gave thumbs up to them. The helo circled around the area and came into position to drop my new buddy, the swimmer, into the water. He jumped from about 10 feet or so and made a perfect entry into the water. Next he swam up to me and made sure I was OK. He reassured me that all was fine as the basket started coming down.

Now we are both back in the rotor wash again and it is impossible to talk. He motioned for me to get into the basket and I did. My friend, the boom, lifted me out of the water and soon I was back onboard the helo. But not for long. The swimmer came up next and then we did it all over again. This time they were going to use a special harness to hoist both of us at once out of the water.

On the way down I started to spin in the rotor wash. It got worse and worse. My buddy, the boom, was toying with me. I stopped spinning when I entered the water for the second time. That was not fun.

Once again the swimmer made a perfect entry into the water. Then the strap came down and Ian explained how to deploy it around my back. Next, he hooked on to me and signaled to the flight mechanic to start to winch us up. By now, I'd gotten used to my boom and we were both lifted to safety.

What an experience! We headed back to base. Mission accomplished.

### **Helo Specifications:**

Crew: 2 pilots and 2 crew

Length: 44 ft. 5 in. (13.5 m)

Rotor diameter: 39 ft. 2 in. (11.9 m)

Height: 13 ft. 6 in. (4.1 m)



Empty weight: 6,333 lbs. (2,872 kg)  
 Max takeoff weight: 9,480 lbs. (4,300 kg)

Powerplants: 2 Turbomeca Arriel  
 2C2-CG turbo shafts, 1,054  
 Shaft hp (697 kW)

Maximum speed: 160 kts, 184 mph  
 (294 km/h)

Range: 356 nm, 409 mi. (659 km)  
 Service ceiling: 15,000 ft. (4,573 m)

### Kevo's Tip:

Being rescued from the water by a helicopter is serious business. Should you ever need to be rescued, by the time it arrives on scene you will most likely be suffering from hypothermia. Don't panic. Follow instructions of the swimmer. They are trained to deal with victims suffering from hypothermia and panic.

Turn your back toward the approaching helo. This will save your eyes and may make a scary situation a little less scary. **WEAR YOUR LIFEJACKET!**

Be safe & happy boating!

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

