

“Get In This Thing”

September 3, 2008



In the days that followed September 11, 2001, I wondered-what could I do that would be something more concrete than writing a check to the Red Cross? While many Americans turned to volunteerism, I was faced with two realities- at nearly 48 years old, I wasn't exactly what the Army recruiter wanted, and secondly, it was apparent the terrorists were seriously dedicated. The unthinkable had become thinkable.

A friend in the military advised me to “Do something you love... many school-age children wanted to be firefighters or police officers when they were kids... go volunteer to help them...” So, I thought about it-beyond family, nation and our God above, what do I love? The sea spread out before my mind's eye.

I turned to the United States Coast Guard Auxiliary, an integral part of the United States Coast Guard Forces. I submit that it is among the most effective ways to “get in this thing.” If you live, work or “summer” on Long Island, please read on.

Over 200 years ago, Richard “Light Horse” Harry Lee, one of George Washington's commanders and ironically the father of Robert E. Lee, coined the immortal saying about George

Washington himself: “First in war, first in peace, and first in the hearts of his countrymen.” The key about an Auxiliarist is that you are neither for war nor for peace but are all about being for America.

Congress established the United States Coast Guard Auxiliary in 1939 to assist the Coast Guard in promoting boating safety. It boasts more than 35,000 members from all walks of life who receive special training so that they may be a functional part of Coast Guard Forces.

Today the Auxiliary plays a larger role with greater responsibilities than at any other time in history. Auxiliarists are at the helm of marine safety and security patrols, serving as foreign language Interpreters, educating the public on recreational boating safety, and supporting many other vital operational and administrative missions. Last year, they saved 257 lives, assisted 10,485 others, volunteered over 440,000 hours in support of Coast Guard operations and more than 69,000 hours educating the recreational boating public.

There is a national level, a district level, a divisional level and, ultimately, the flotilla level. The flotilla is where the rubber meets the road or, better put, where the hull meets the waves.

All members join the Auxiliary by joining a local flotilla, and that is where the real work gets done-everything from Crew Augmentation on USCG sea-going vessels to helping out in the mess hall at a duty station. And, there couldn't be a better time to join as USCG Auxiliary Division 18 (essentially, eastern Long Island) is in the midst of a concerted recruitment campaign.

Do you need a boat to join? Absolutely not! We'll train you to become a certified crewmember. However, if you have one and want to get it certified as an “Operational Facility,” you one day could find yourself leading a patrol as coxswain on the deck of your own vessel with a crew under your responsibility.

Do you need to know how to swim to join? Again, no! There are many jobs within the USCG Auxiliary that are wholly land-based-public education, public affairs, radio watch standing at a USCG Coast Guard station or helping out as a mechanic at the motor pool. You don't even have to like the water... you just have to want “get in this thing” and do something for your nation.

It has been said that this will remain the land of the free only so long as it is the home of the brave.

Be brave. Get in this thing.