

The Officers, Directors and Members of
US SAILING
are pleased to present the
ARTHUR B. HANSON RESCUE MEDAL
to the crew of

Commotion

for the rescue as follows:

Taking their turn as Race Committee for the day, Ross Hunton, and crew, went out in the 20 to 25 knot winds, and 3 to 5 foot seas for the start at the Gulfstream Sailing Club in Ft. Lauderdale, FL on July, 22, 2001. Air and water temperatures were in the low 80's.

One and a half miles offshore, they saw something off to the side. It was three scuba divers who were separated from their boat for more than one hour. Fortunately the divers were wearing their buoyancy compensating vests and wetsuits. The divers were waving a 4' bright orange inflatable safety tube for signaling, without this device, Ross believed he never would had seen them.

The wind and waves continued to build, Ross called that the dive flag tethered to the divers be reeled in, to prevent it from entangling the propeller on his Beneteau 35S5. When Ross came head to wind and stopped, the wind and waves quickly blew the bow down away from their target. During the next pass, he lay the boat ahull, drifting down on the divers position. When in range, Ross' crew deployed three lines, one to each diver to provide connection. Each was reeled over to the swim ladder in the scooped transom, and was amazed to see how well this worked, hauling three exhausted two-hundred pound men, plus their scuba equipment on board.

Since the one boat that appeared for the start of the race had a break down, the Race Committee was relieved of their obligation and headed in. They found the errant dive boat 1-1/2 miles away whose driver explained that the dive flag submerged when the divers went down and could not track them.

Congratulations to Ross Hunton, Astrid Hunton, Garie Blackwell Wood, and Charlie Baumgartner. US SAILING is pleased to present the Arthur B. Hanson Rescue Medal in recognition of this event.

Ralph Naranjo, Chair
Safety at Sea Committee

By Direction

The Arthur B. Hanson Rescue Medal was presented to Garie Blackwell, Charlie Baumgartner, Astrid Hunton, Ross Hunton at the Columbus Day Regatta winners dinner on October 13, 2001, Miami, FL by US SAILING Safety at Sea Committee Member Cai Svendsen.

106-0627A_IMG.jpg (89885 bytes)

Left to Right: Garie Blackwell, Charlie Baumgartner,
Astrid Hunton, Ross Hunton, Cai Svendsen
Jay Wood, Photographer

DETAILS:

Nominated by Bill Jarvis:

Copied, with permission, from the SailNet Beneteau Bulletin Board.

I got to execute an honest-to-god rescue the other day.

We went out in 20-25 kts, 3-5ft seas (and building) to dutifully take our turn as committee boat for the day's racing. Because the wind was coming from an unusual direction, we were headed out about a mile and a half offshore to a spot we wouldn't normally be in to set up the starting line.

As we approached the starting area, I noticed some SCUBA divers off to one side.

1st thought: "Hey, there are some of those maniacs who dive from sea kayaks."

2nd thought: "Hey, there aren't any sea kayaks."

3rd thought: "Hey, there isn't a dive boat anywhere around here."

From this insightful chain of reasoning, I brilliantly deduced that the divers' frantic waving wasn't a "You idiot, get the heck out of here! Can't you see our dive flag?" but was instead a "HELP!"

I motored over closer to the divers, and asked if they needed any help.

"Need any help?" I asked.

"...gasp..., ...sputter..., YES!" they replied.

So we began the recovery operation. I had the divers reel in their dive flag so the line wouldn't get in the prop. Once that was done, I attempted to bring the boat head-to-wind in neutral alongside the divers so that we could recover them off the swim platform. That wasn't happening. By this time, the wind had picked up some, the seas were building and the nose of the boat would blow down pretty quickly once I took the way off. So finally, what I did was to lay a-hull just upwind of the divers. The boat was stable this way, and we had a drift rate of about a knot or so. We tied a few lines to the boat and tossed them to the divers as safety lines to keep them nearby. One at a time, the divers were able to climb up the swim ladder with our assistance and collapsed on the foredeck.

It seems that they were drift diving and their buddy in the boat that was to pick them up wandered off while they were down (he claimed the floating flag submerged as they went down). They'd been on the surface for about an hour wondering what to do when we found them.

The only other boat that showed up for the race that day broke their rudder and retired, so we scrubbed the race and took the boat home. On the way we found the divers' boat wandering around about 1.5 miles from where we were. Boy did he look sheepish.

From this I learned a couple of things: If one of the divers hadn't had a 4 foot long inflatable blaze orange signaling tube, I would never have seen them. With their BC's fully inflated, only their (dark haired) heads stuck up out of the water and their (black gloved) hands. Even in the middle of a Florida day with the sun beating down, there is no way to see a person in 3 foot waves from more than about 200 feet away. If it had been night, forget it. A lifejacket is not

sufficient to ensure you can recover a MOB. Make sure everyone has signaling capability that works night and day. I went out and bought one of those inflatable tubes the next day. \$20 seemed cheap.

Aside from visibility issues, I also learned some more about boat handling. We've always done our MOB drills on nice days with calm seas and not too much wind. I strongly recommend practicing on not nice days - you'll find out some things about what your boat will or won't do.

Finally, I always suspected it, but I really learned to appreciate our scooped-out transom's swimmer recovery capabilities. Many sailboats would have been seriously hard pressed to pull three 200lb tired guys with full scuba gear on board. It was almost easy for us, though.

Net net, we scooped up three very lucky guys, no one got hurt, and I now supposedly get a lifetime supply of fresh crab. We'll see.

Additional Information:

Our adventure took place on Sunday, July 22nd. I am a member of the Gulfstream Sailing Club (GSC), located in Fort Lauderdale, FL. Our web site is <http://www.gulfstreamsailingclub.org>. Our adventure is documented on the web site by the Principle Race Officer for our club (Garie Blackwell) who was aboard that day. GSC is a non-locational club, but you can find the contact information on our web page.

Unfortunately, we didn't write down the divers names or phone numbers so I won't be able to pass that info along. We didn't make a mayday call, although we did call SeaTow and discuss the situation with them as we'd observed them towing an apparently-empty boat off the water some time before the incident occurred. Subsequent to the rescue, I advised SeaTow that we had the divers safely on board.

All three divers were wearing BCD's. The air temperature was in the 80's, and the water temperature was around 80, so I don't believe that hypothermia would have been a major concern for an extended period of time but if I recall correctly, none of the divers were wearing wet suits and all were somewhat chilled by the time we recovered them.

Commotion is not equipped with a Lifesling, but I am strongly considering purchasing one now as it's use would have been helpful in this situation.

Ross
35s5 #55 "Commotion"