

## “I WAS THERE BEFORE THE BABY WAS BORN!”

The interview below was conducted in November 1988 by Ev Tucker with George L. Richardson, Past Division Captain, Division III. A true charter member of the Auxiliary, George joined on 13 December 1939 and was an active member for over 57 years. Here is his account of the founding from a member's perspective:

“In 1938, I had a 26 foot boat that I paid \$150 for. A friend and I were tied up on the beach at Yorktown, Virginia. My friend was playing his guitar and singing. We were having a good time. Soon a group of men came out of the hotel and came out on the beach. It seems that a civic meeting of some sort had just ended. They sat down and listened to us. After a while one of them came over to us and introduced himself. It was Judge Otis Bland, our Congressman. He said, “Boys, I'm glad to see you. I'll tell you something, I'm Chairman of the Coast Guard Committee and am working on a Bill to create a Coast Guard Reserve.” We went on home and at the time I didn't think anything about it.

About 18 months later, I got a letter asking that I make arrangements for a meeting on 13 December 1939 at the Commonwealth Club in Richmond as a Coast Guard Officer was coming to Richmond to talk about the Coast Guard Reserve, as the Auxiliary was known then. Some 29 people and I attended the meeting. All of us were boat owners and interested in learning more about boating and seamanship. The officer, LT Chester Anderson, USCG, from the Fifth Naval District, told us that Judge Bland's bill had passed in June creating a Coast Guard Reserve. He explained all about the new organization and said that it would make us better boaters. Most people there, including me, were terribly interested in joining that night and we quickly filled out the application forms.

LT Anderson said that before we could become members, we had to have a local organization. So we had to elect some flotilla officers. I was elected Flotilla Vice Commander. So we became members on 13 December 1939. Our flotilla was initially designated Flotilla 4, although we were the first unit in the district. Our seniority was recognized a few

months later when we were named Flotilla 5-1 (Fifth District, Flotilla 1). LT Chet Anderson was our first Director of Auxiliary and a very affable person. Initially, there were no district or division officers, just flotillas. In 1949 divisions were established. We had very little paperwork and emphasis was placed on member training.

The first thing of any consequence with the Coast Guard came up in May 1940 when LT Anderson called me and said that we were going to examine the members' boats. LT Anderson asked me to meet him after he came across on the ferry at Yorktown. I stayed with him for three days as we inspected the boats belonging to my flotilla's members. This was the first chance I had to be a vessel examiner. We looked for many of the things that are on our facility inspections today: PFDs, carburetor backfire flame arrester, anchor, fire extinguishers, etc. We went all over the area and up the Potomac River checking boats. The owners were mostly not present and that caused us great difficulties in finding where the boats were. By the time we finished, both of us were exhausted. As I remember, all the boats were passed; however, there were no decals awarded nor any letters sent telling you that your vessel was accepted by the Coast Guard. About this same time we started doing an informal "CME" on non-member boats, although there was no specific established program. It was a true "courtesy exam." There were no scheduled patrols as we have today. You were expected to give assistance to any disabled boaters when you were out on the water.

We had hardly gotten into the Auxiliary when World War II started. This created havoc in the Coast Guard as the regulars left us and went off to sea; the Reserves took their place and the missions planned for the Auxiliary changed. We first put on uniforms in 1942, as it took some time to decide what kind of uniforms we should wear. We wore khaki uniforms with a large patch on the sleeve designating us as V-I.

I joined to learn about boating. So I took courses. You understand what is meant by the international correspondence school. You did the work and sent them into be graded up at the Academy; however, we got no feedback. After I asked if we could do something better, the Academy gave us a series of 200 seamanship questions with answers so that we could study and learn. We had a flotilla meeting and went over every question. This was for our benefit as we weren't graded on them; however, I felt that if I was Flotilla Vice Commander, I should know more than the other members. I'll never forget the Rules of the Road questions!

We were also encouraged to go aboard the cutters at Portsmouth and observe the Coast Guard crew, both at the dock and underway. I took several trips on the Cutter Hamilton, including one trip up the Potomac to Washington. I learned a whole lot about seamanship and boat handling by watching the skill and professionalism of the Coast Guard personnel. A good number of our members took advantage of this opportunity and later passed on what they had learned during our member training classes.

As you remember, there was no easy way to communicate between vessels at that time; just signal flags and semaphore. At our second meeting in 1940, I got a hold of the Chesapeake & Potomac Telephone Company and arranged for them to talk to us about ship-to-ship radio communications. We even set up a station so that we could have a 3-way conversation with boats out on the river. The C&P provided amplifiers which allowed us all to hear the transmission; this was another example of one of our first real member training classes.

Another early class was given by Major Tom Campbell, one of our sailboaters, on navigation. We all learned about “Can dead men vote twice!” Most of us knew nothing about compasses, courses and charts; we just went out on waters that we were familiar with. The Auxiliary opened up our eyes to navigation. We even took courses in celestial navigation. Our flotilla was quite active at teaching its members, both at meetings and in special training sessions.

During the war, our flotilla did everything it could to assist the war effort. Since our Flotilla Commander, Ken Miller, was soon moved up to Division Captain, I became Flotilla Commander and served there throughout the war, except for a short period when I was Division Captain. We helped in processing personnel going into the Coast Guard, both officer and enlisted. We taught classes and administered exams to officers and operated an enlisting office on Broad Street. We collected up and took recreational boats down to Portsmouth for use by Coast Guard personnel. While we were out on our boats, we watched for anything suspicious and reported our observations to the Coast Guard. Once the Coast Guard borrowed my boat, which was unpainted, and used it for 3-4 days. I believe they were out looking for German submarines. At this same time, some Auxiliarists were patrolling offshore in sailboats looking for submarines. They were finding signs even within Back Bay that Germans were landing in our area.

In early 1942, we found time to hold our first public education class. Since there were no books, we taught them what we knew about boat handling and navigation. From that time on, we continued to teach boating classes to the public.

A major effort by us was in the selling of war bonds; we were tremendously successful in our bond drives. A number of our members served on active duty, while others served both in the Auxiliary and the Temporary Reserve. I believe we provided a lot of valuable assistance to the war effort.“

Note: George continued as an active member of Flotilla 31, Fifth District – Southern, until his death in 1997 at the age of 98. He continued after the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary to be an active boater on his HUMMINGBIRD IV, a 1972 60-foot Trumpy. During the time of the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary, George told me that he and his professional crew were still active in assisting boaters in distress. Recently, he had assisted a small runabout off Thomas Point Light in the Chesapeake Bay by giving it a tow back into port. When told he was not qualified under the Boat-Crew Program to do this, George remarked “that if you fly the Blue Ensign, you are obligated to do the things that the Auxiliary stands for.” Asked about the present day Auxiliary, he said “there’s just too much paperwork. We should focus on assisting boaters in distress and preventing accidents on the water.” He saw a need to return to more emphasis on fun and fellowship. His Auxiliary of the war years both worked and played hard!