

Coast Guard Station KITSILANO:

SAFETY FIRST, SERVICE ALWAYS

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CCG Station Kitsilano is located where English Bay merges into False Creek under Burrard Street Bridge in Vancouver.

STORY AND PHOTOS BY TIM LYNCH

In the course of writing the article, “Canada’s Coast Guard at the Crossroads,” (*Fisherman Life* August 2007), CCG Public Affairs arranged for me to meet with Captain Gerry Moores, Coxswain of CCG Cutter *Osprey* at the Coast Guard Station Kitsilano, Vancouver. The meeting was arranged for 2 pm with the caveat that the timing of search and rescue was unpredictable and had priority.

CCG Station Kitsilano is located where English Bay merges into False Creek on the south-westerly waterfront just under Burrard Street Bridge in Vancouver, which, on a sunny July afternoon looked like the perfect location to work from. A modern looking grey building, the Station was rededicated in June 1994 following a fire that burned down the earlier wooden structure. Approaching the Station along Whyte St. leading to the Burrard Civic Mariner, one passes the Space Centre, Vancouver Museum and Vancouver City Archives. In

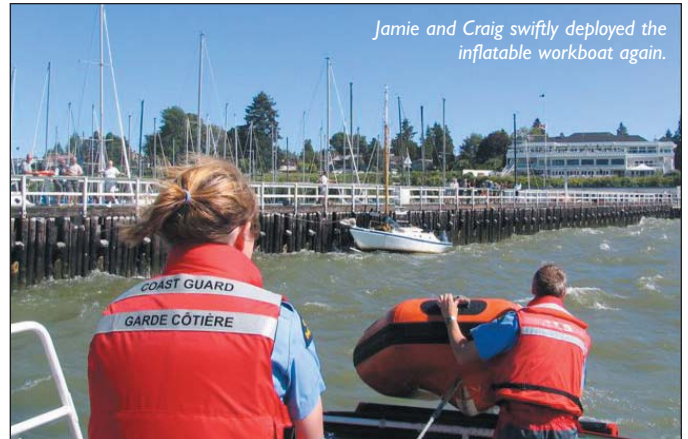
July the location is dominated by the presence of the Bard on the Beach theatrical group just across the car park. Originally the site of a World War II Royal Canadian Air Force supply depot, the Station is an integral part of the Kitsilano community, and in fact it was the local residents that insisted on its rededication following the 1992 fire. The station serves a primary response area of Vancouver Harbour, Howe Sound, English Bay, Lower Fraser River and Indian Arm. Occasionally the Station responds to calls from the South Arm of the Fraser River, which is also served by the CCG Hovercraft out of Sea Island. Depending on response required, CCG Kitsilano personnel may travel as far afield as Sechart.

Paul James, a former Officer in Charge at Kitsilano let me into the station. He was keeping a radio and telephone watch as a volunteer. He explained that Gerry Moores and his rescue team had been called out on a mission and would be

returning shortly. Apparently the rescue team is responsible for the maintenance of the station and its array of rescue equipment as well as attending to rescues when called on by the Joint Rescue Co-ordination Centre (JRCC), Victoria. While I waited for Gerry and the *Osprey* to return I settled down to a most enlightening conversation with Paul about his 30 years in the Coast Guard.

When the *Osprey* arrived back at base, Paul showed me a vantage point to take pictures. The 41 ft. cutter serves as the primary rescue boat based at the station. It has two Caterpillar engines of 450 horsepower each, it can reach a maximum speed of 29 knots and draws about 4 ft. of water. The station also uses a 7.33 meter Hurricane fast response rigid hull inflatable with twin 150 Hp outboards. The Hurricane is equipped with a steel sheet on its hull to allow for beaching during rescues without being damaged. In addition to Gerry, the *Osprey* is crewed by Leading Seaman and Rescue Specialists Ms Jamie McNab and Craig Kapeluck.

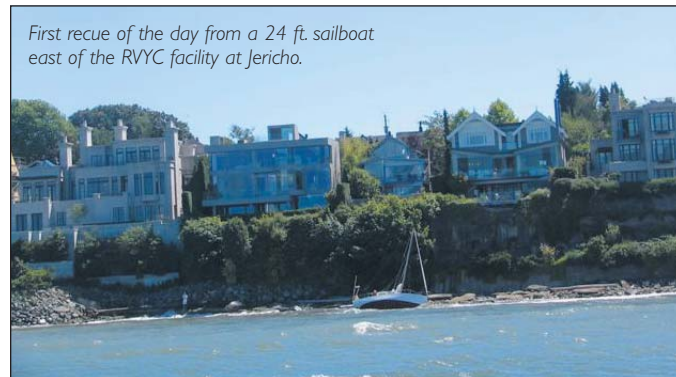
My 2 pm interview started around 2:40. We were less than five minutes into the interview when there was a call for assistance and *Osprey* and her crew were dispatched. The call originated near the Station, at Jericho, and as a feature of my officially-sanctioned visit I was allowed to accompany the crew to gain an impression of their work.



Jamie and Craig swiftly deployed the inflatable workboat again.

Jamie and Craig quickly launched *Osprey's* inflatable workboat and went to the rescue of the elderly gentleman who owned the sailboat. He was brought aboard the *Osprey* and after being assisted by the crew, they made arrangements with a salvage company to recover his boat on the next high tide, and he was brought back to the CCG station at Kitsilano.

After things calmed down I resumed my interview with Gerry, only to have it cancelled five minutes later by another call for assistance. This time I knew the drill and with life jacket on I headed out with Gerry, Jamie and Craig in *Osprey* to the west side of the RVYC breakwater in the more exposed waters of English Bay.



First rescue of the day from a 24 ft sailboat east of the RVYC facility at Jericho.

I was required to wear a lifejacket, so prior to leaving the station Jamie assisted me in finding one that fit and then hurriedly helped me into it. I was surprised by the size of the waves as we entered English Bay; the wind was much stronger on water than on land. While trying to look inconspicuous in the confined space of *Osprey's* wheelhouse, I braced myself against the waves. Jamie suggested that I relax my knees. She was right; my lack of a nautical education was becoming increasingly apparent.

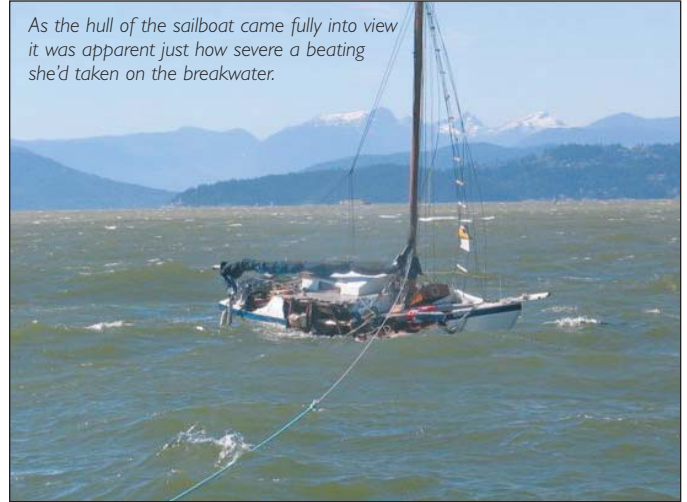
We quickly got up to emergency response speed and after some minutes of plunging heavily through waves that steadily increased in size the crew sighted the vessel in distress, a 24 ft. sailboat stranded just east of the Royal Vancouver Yacht Club (RVYC) facility at Jericho. The boat had been driven hard aground on a boulder-strewn lenticular sandstone ledge beneath a precipitous rock bluff. It was a couple hundred feet away and Gerry made a quick decision to remove the owner from the boat, which was still being pounded by powerful rollers.



Jamie and Craig coordinate with Gerry on *Osprey* on how to rescue the boat.



Jamie and Craig coordinate with RVYC members to secure line.



We found another sailboat in distress, this time a 26 ft. vessel being smashed and battered against the heavily timbered walls of the Club's breakwater. Several RVYC members and staff had managed to secure lines to the boat, which had apparently broken free from her sandy anchorage in the high winds and roiling seas. They were attempting to minimize the damage which the boat was suffering from repeated impacts with the breakwater. There was no one on board, but the vessel had to be towed clear of the structure or face imminent total destruction, perhaps accompanied by a release of pollutants onto the sensitive beaches nearby.

The same routine was followed as with the previous operation. Gerry manoeuvred *Osprey* in the short, choppy six foot waves, the conditions magnified by waves deflecting from the breakwater wall and interacting with the incoming sea. Jamie and Craig swiftly deployed the inflatable workboat again and Craig took it alongside the battered vessel. He made a quick tactical survey of the situation and had a hurried consultation with the RVYC members. They were holding lines connected to the distressed vessel and were directed to pass the strongest and most suitably located of the lines to Craig so that the boat could be towed into the relatively more sheltered waters east of the breakwater by *Osprey*. In order for this plan to work, Jamie had to join Craig on the inflatable so that she could tie up the lines while he managed the inflatable. Through the manoeuvring of the *Osprey* by Gerry and skilful timing between Craig and Jamie, an intricate nautical ballet with the required lines would be successfully accomplished.

The towline was passed from RVYC members and Jamie expertly bent it to a Coast Guard towline while Craig manoeuvred the inflatable as it bounced around in the choppy waves. Coming alongside *Osprey* Jamie quickly secured the towline to a sturdy cleat on *Osprey's* starboard quarter and gracefully transferred herself onboard. Craig then at once steered the inflatable workboat clear so that Gerry could tow the distressed vessel off the face of the breakwater wall. As the hull of the sailboat came fully into view it became apparent just how severe a beating she'd taken on the breakwater. Much of

her starboard hull planking was shattered or missing and she was sluggish with the weight of water she had taken on during the pounding.

Gerry maneuvered the tow to minimize any further intake of water. However, the sailboat continued to flood and then abruptly yawed and began to sink just north of the RVYC breakwater. She rapidly rolled and settled in the water drawing the towline bar tight. Jamie responded instantly to Gerry's order to sever the towline. With a single blow from the razor sharp blade drawn from her belt sheath Jamie slashed the towline as the stricken vessel began its plunge into the depths. The relentless seas instantly filled the hole in the water that the vessel had occupied moments before, leaving me with a sense of disbelief at what I had just witnessed. All that remained was the sad remains of the life that had been lived aboard her, bobbing on the windblown sea. *Osprey's* crew arranged the pickup of the floating material by a vessel from the Jericho Sailing Centre, and then slowly went alongside at the RVYC float.




The necessary formalities and documentation were just being completed between the Coast Guard and RVYC when Gerry received a third call from JRCC directing him to eastern False Creek where a number of boats were dragging their anchors with the stiff wind. Gerry completed his administrative duties and departed at once for False Creek, making all possible speed on the following sea. By this time I was becoming almost at ease with high speed runs in choppy waters across English Bay, and it seemed like travel from RVYC to Burrard Street bridge was just a minute or two.

As they neared the drifting boats the *Osprey's* crew checked their positions for safety, then assisted one of the owners by directing him to a safe anchorage and transporting him to shore after he had re-anchored his vessel. We finally returned to Coast Guard Station Kitsilano after 5:30 pm that day.

All in all, we'd had a very eventful afternoon, and one representative of many such days for CCG Station Kitsilano in serving the boating public on an around the clock basis. My interview with Gerry turned into a conversation about my discovery of the location of the CCG station at Kitsilano, and not hearing about it while doing the marine emergency response article "On Guard for Thee" (*Mariner Life*, October 2006). I was interested in learning about the degree to which the Kitsilano Station was integrated with the BC Government's Provincial Emergency Program (PEP) and the Emergency Communications (E-Comm). Coast Guard Cutter *Osprey*, just as other Coast Guard vessels, is fitted with E-Comm radios, which allows the crew to render assistance to certain other units as authorised by JRCC. While the Coast Guard's mandate is to provide rescue service for the local boating public, the agency may also participate in regional disaster incidents when requested by PEP. CCG provided equipment during Kelowna forest fires in 2003 and more recently provided fuel to Prince Rupert during the flooding earlier this year. Such involvement in regional disaster management is coordinated by JRCC and / or CCG Regional Operations Centre.

Commenting on the article I did about the VPD Marine Unit (*Mariner Life* April 2007), Gerry expressed concern about my reporting on Sea Island Coast Guard refusing to assist Richmond RCMP in response to a gun shooting incident on the water. From an operational perspective, he

explained that Coast Guard personnel are not armed, except for certain fisheries officers carrying out enforcement duties in conjunction with their work. Other operational personnel in marine units are neither trained nor equipped with protective apparel to deal appropriately with firearms incidents. Thus, if indeed such a refusal to attend a firearms incident did occur, it may have been appropriate in the circumstances. Gerry suggested that had JRCC been involved, the watch-keeping staff there would be aware of the constraints faced by CCG personnel, and they could have facilitated a response by an appropriately trained and equipped agency. Gerry concluded our interview quoting the Coast Guard motto: "Safety First, Service Always." 

Tim Lynch is a public policy analyst living in Steveston. All articles referred to above are available at www.infolyink.ca/bcmaritimepolicy.html. Please send any comments to tim@infolyink.ca

Correction: In the August 2007 article "Canada's Coast Guard at the Crossroads," the second paragraph in the final section entitled *A New Maritime Policing Paradigm*, should have read:

During a public seminar at the Liu Centre of International Relations UBC, Dr. Andreas Schloenhardt, a visiting professor from Queensland University Australia and an international authority on Transnational Organised Crime, described how organised crime has global implications. While air-cargo, passengers, and the postal system are used for Narcotraficking (drugs), trafficking in persons (sex) and firearms trafficking (guns), bulk shipments tend to be maritime crimes. The policing functions of investigations, searches, arrests and prosecutions in the context of non-security issues beyond the border enters into the parameters of national defence and the military. Noting that the wider impact of criminal acts on governance and corruption relates to the defence portfolio, Schloenhardt said "In terms of transnational criminal activities we really need to challenge the traditional separation of law enforcement and the application of military force."

An account of the presentation by Dr. Schloenhardt is published on line by the Mackenzie Institute <http://www.mackenzieinstitute.com/recent-writings.htm>



CCG vessel *Osprey*