

An introduction to Sailing & Seamanship

by Allen Kruger, Chief, Sailing and Seamanship Branch; Doug Clark, Director of Sailing; and Brian Swingly, Assistant Sailing Coach



Before a cadet ever steps foot on a Luders Yawl for participation in the Coastal Sail Training Program (CSTP), they have already participated in two small boat sail training programs: the Swab Summer Sailing Program and a one-week Ship-Handling course aboard the T-Boats during their 2/c summer. For those cadets who are unable to participate in the CSTP, there is the one-week Colgate 26 Small Keelboat Course. This article serves as an introduction to both the Swab Summer Sailing Program and the 2/c Summer sail training programs (excluding the CSTP, which is discussed in an article on page 34). The other seminal sail training experience is Eagle, which will be discussed in a later issue.

Swab Summer Training

The Swab Summer Sailing Program is unlike any other sailing program in the country in that an incredibly high number of participants are trained to be proficient in the fundamentals of sailing during the course of only six sessions. For most of the newest members to the Academy, this is the time where they first see their Academy from a waterborne perspective and their connection with the sea begins. The program is an excellent introduction to the water, the sport of sailing, and serves as a launch pad for much of the professional training they will receive as cadets.

The program serves a dual purpose. It is a leadership and organizational exercise for the 2/c cadets selected as Waterfront Cadre, and it is an instructional program for the newly reported swabs. Only a few days after reporting in day (R-Day) the incoming class of cadets get their first introduction to the waterfront at the Coast Guard Academy and are given the chance to show their sea legs in the Academy's fleet of sail training dinghies.

The SWAB Summer Sail Training Program includes six waterfront sessions held at the Sailing and Seamanship Center at Jacobs Rock over the course of the summer. The classes are taught by 2/c Cadet Waterfront Cadre under the direction of a 1/c Cadet Regimental Waterfront Officer and a junior Coast Guard Officer practicum supervisor. The goal is to introduce each student to the basics of sailing and seamanship, safety afloat, and begin to instill an appreciation for the sea and its lore.

The program thoroughly covers the basics of sailing during the six weeks and includes wind and current familiarization, parts of the boat, points of sail, rigging and de-rigging, righting a capsized boat, rules of the road, nomenclature, and safety afloat. Each training session consists of a three-hour class where two companies participate in classroom instruction in sailing theory and practical and on-the-water demonstrations. Each time they come to the waterfront, cadets pick a partner, rig their boats, and get underway in either a 420 or FJ sailing dinghy. Utilizing the experience of trained waterfront cadre along with a good instructor to student ratio, each swab receives hands on training in these fundamental areas.

A majority of the swabs are new to sailing when they report aboard. However, by the end of the program, swabs must demonstrate proficiency in both dockside and underway tests. Most swabs, who in the beginning of the program couldn't name a single part of a sailboat, are able to rig their boat, go sailing, and return to the dock safely. Those that pass certain criteria will gain a Sailing Dinghy Qualification that allows them to sail recreationally. But for all, participation in this program has introduced them to a whole new world and are now ready for their next sail training experience – EAGLE.

Second Class Summer Training

During the summer after completion of their second academic year, all Second Class cadets ascend upon the Waterfront for continuation of their sailing, seamanship, ship-handling and leadership training. The programs currently offered are the two-week Coastal Sail Training Program aboard the Luders Yawls (read more about this program on page 34), a one-week Ship-Handling course aboard the T-Boats, and a one week Colgate 26 Small Keelboat Course. All 2/c complete the T-Boat course and either the Coastal Program on the Luders or the Colgate 26 Program. The optimum training goal is to have all 2/c complete the Coastal Program and will hopefully be met with the addition of the fleet of Leadership 44s. For now, the Colgate Program is utilized to train cadets that aren't able to participate in the Coastal Program, about 50% of the class.

While the Swab Summer Sailing Program teaches incoming cadets the very basics of sailing in a controlled environment, the Coastal Program and the Small Keelboat Program takes the SWAB introduction a few steps further for more sailing instruction to further develop their skills on larger sailing platforms. The Colgate 26 program is taught over the course of 5 days in the Academy's fleet of Colgate 26s by a group of newly commissioned Coast Guard Ensigns.

During the course of the summer training period – the week after Commencement to about the second week in August – sections of approximately 24 2/c cadets report to the waterfront for training in either T-Boats, Colgates or Luders. Throughout the Colgate Course of a week, cadets learn all they need to know to safely operate and sail a Colgate 26. The curriculum for the Academy's Small Keelboat Sailing Program coincides with that of the US Sailing Small Keelboat Certification. Cadets learn skills and can qualify as a Small Keelboat Helmsman to allow use of the Academy craft during recreational periods.



On the first day, they are split up into small groups in which they work for the entire week. Each group is in charge of a particular Colgate with an Ensign Instructor. The beginning of the week is lesson intensive with a lot of time practicing maneuvers in front of the Academy on the Thames River. Cadets rotate through the four crew positions including helmsman while the Ensign on board each boat creates an intimate learning environment that provides instant feedback and additional coaching when needed. After only a few days of practice on the river, the cadets are fully prepared for their two destination sails, which are designed to challenge the cadets with more than just sailing and to provide an opportunity to explore the beautiful waters of the Thames River, Eastern Long Island Sound and Fishers Island Sound.

During the destination sails, the ensigns step off the sailboats and into a safety boat. The cadets are responsible for planning and executing the entire trip using the skills they have learned during the past few days. They plan their route taking into account the day's weather forecast and predicted tides, and provision each boat with food, water, and the required Coast Guard and State of Connecticut safety gear. Once they leave the dock, the cadets work together to navigate their planned route under sail or power. The ensigns are along for support and safety but now it is the cadets who make all the important decisions. The trips usually last for the whole day and include a short anchored time for lunch and a swim along the route before heading back to the Academy. For many of the cadets, this may be the first time underway in a boat of this size where they are in-charge all while seeing the beautiful surroundings of their Academy that aren't usually visible by land.

Coastal Sail Training Inspires

“A Liking for the Sea and its Lore”



By LCDR Camilla Bosanquet '97, Coastal Sail Training Safety Officer

That first time the wind catches the mainsail and the yawl heels hard over, with the sound of waves slapping against the hull, the taste of salt in the air, and Block Island Sound in view – our cadets experience the quintessential Coastal Sail Training moment. Ask Cuttermen what makes life at sea so enthralling and they might tell you that there is something alluring and special about serving alongside shipmates, facing infinite possibilities of new and unique challenges together, while operating in mother-nature's temperamental marine environment. Our Coastal Sail Training Program offers the Corps of Cadets an insight to all of this, and more.

Now a staple of the 2/c summer experience, the Coastal Sail Training Program affords cadets an opportunity for hands-on learning. While living aboard their 44' sailboat, teams of cadets bring classroom theory to bear on real-world scenarios. Leadership, navigation, and engineering come alive as cadets supervise and direct their peers, transit between New England ports, and maintain and operate their assigned yawl over a two-week period. In fact, cadets enjoy a relatively high degree of autonomy with such assumption of responsibility for the safe and efficient operation of their sailboat. The lessons learned from this exercise in self-sufficiency alone are innumerable.



Following a sortie this past summer, one cadet shared that sailing “gave me the chance to practice what we have been learning in the Nautical Science classroom these last two years.” This having been said, the benefits of the program are many, and transcend merely professional development. While too numerous to list here, what follows are some of my own observations regarding the holistic development cadets undergo during their summer Coastal Sail Training Program experience.

Leadership

The cadets each assume permanent duties (e.g. Operations Officer, Commissary Officer, Engineering Officer, First Lieutenant, and Master-at-Arms) that require them to care for

each other and the vessel. Furthermore, as cadets rotate through daily watch positions (i.e. Watch Captain, Navigator, Helmsman, Deckhand, and Cook) they must alternately lead and follow their peers. The dynamic of working on a team of equals often proves challenging yet insightful. Also, the sailboat’s extremely tight quarters add another unique dimension; cadets quickly come to understand the imperative of demonstrating respect to their shipmates in every interaction.

To encourage reflection and internalization of lessons learned from each day’s experiences, the assigned Officer in Charge facilitates daily debriefings, typically over dinner with the crew. Furthermore, cadets write essays upon the conclusion of the ten-day sortie

enumerating their personal experiences. Cadets frequently comment on the fact that they appreciate having had the opportunity to lead their peers, i.e. they realize that the Coastal Sail Training Program pushed them to develop their leadership style beyond, as an example, the transactional approach traditionally thought necessary to conduct swab summer indoctrination.

Seamanship

The cadets must employ tools of the maritime trade in the execution of their sorties. They plan transits, provide navigation briefings, carry out chart-work, apply rules of the road, and engage in piloting and coastal navigation by means of magnetic compass, radar and GPS. Furthermore, cadets maneuver the vessels under both sail and power, requiring both the application of basic shiphandling concepts and the utilization of foresight and initiative.



Cadets also gain familiarization with certain engineering fundamentals ranging from the operation of machinery (e.g. motors, pumps, macerators) to basic ship design (e.g. thru-hull fittings and ballast). Watchstanding duties and procedures mirror those required aboard cutters, made complete with concomitant Personnel Qualification Standards. Finally, the insights cadets gain operating a small vessel in the weather boosts not only their technical proficiency, but their understanding of what a mariner in distress might experience while awaiting rescue.

“The lessons learned...in self-sufficiency alone are innumerable.”

Life skills

Each crew assumes responsibility for their assigned sailboat. Cadets must plan and execute their sortie in the minutest of detail. Proper budgeting, decent cooking, efficient stowage, and thorough cleaning take on new significance for cadets when they accept personal responsibility for their own happiness and well-being. With some coaching and encouragement from their Officer in Charge, cadets typically rise to the task, taking the close-quarters living situation from merely tolerable to downright enjoyable.



Officer presence

Many of the cadets, despite having accrued time in the Academy's dinghy sailboats, report aboard the 44's lacking confidence in their own abilities to orchestrate coastal sailing evolutions. In short order, however,

“In short order...they discover their voice and...realize that they can... serve in command.

they discover their voice and come to realize that they can, in fact, serve in command. The poise they develop while underway shines through once dockside. In their interactions with the boating public throughout New England, cadets admirably represent the Academy and the Coast Guard as they enthusiastically articulate their recent adventures.

The program also affords cadets an opportunity to interact with a commissioned officer in a small-group setting for upwards of 12-15 hours each day. The officers involved in the program represent a variety of specialties: Operations Afloat and Ashore, Aviation, et al. These officers share hard-won insights while mentoring and coaching cadets through the two-week program. While cadets work intensively with the Officer in Charge assigned to their boat, they frequently take advantage of the opportunity to interact with, and hear sea stories from, other officers in the squadron.

Rear Admiral Burhoe, in reflecting upon the Coastal Sail Training Program, has acknowledged that “there is no better leadership classroom than a sailing vessel that offers the cadet the opportunity for small unit command and control in the maritime environment.” After nearly five decades of performing this mission, the Luders fleet has served its mission well. The replacement fleet of Leadership 44’s promises to increase our capacity so that we might provide the entire Corps of Cadets with the Coastal Sail Training experience on modern, reliable, seaworthy vessels. Moreover, these new sailboats will continue the tradition of inspiring a liking for the sea and its lore and developing the prerequisite seamanship, navigation, and leadership proficiencies essential to the professional Coast Guard officer.

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For more information about the Leadership 44 campaign, please contact Jim Sylvester, John Maxham, or Andrew Krupa at (860) 442-2683 or visit www.cgaleadership44.org.