

BOAT CREW BASICS

A GUIDE FOR BOAT CREW CANDIDATES & MENTORS

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“Pass Towline to Another Boat and Take in Tow”

Not so many years ago, we got plenty of tows on patrol. For a variety of reasons, that is seldom the case these days. Accordingly, Aux boat crews can get a little rusty with this critical task. Often, we QE's are told that the last time a crewmember passed a heaving line or the towline was at the last Requal patrol!

Whether you use a heaving line or not, there are some basics to getting the towline over that we should all know. Make sure the disabled boat has a crewman stationed up forward to receive the line. The helmsman should position your boat within 20 to 30 feet of the disabled boat, hopefully upwind to assist in getting the line over.

If using a heaving line, attach it to your towline or tow bridle with the spliced-in-place snap-shackle, a bowline or clove hitch. Prepare the line for heaving by coiling it into a loose coil roughly two to three feet in diameter, based on line size.

When near the disabled boat, wait until the Coxswain directs you to heave it over. This should happen when your position is directly abeam the other boat's bow, with her crewman ready and waiting to receive the line. Grab 2/3 of the coil in your heaving hand; hold the other 1/3 of the coil in your other hand, ready to pay out freely. Warn the other crew that you're sending the line over. Do not throw the line at the other boat, throw it beyond her. The line should end up draped over her bow, with enough of it beyond the other boat, even into the water, to preclude its sliding back into the water between both boats, making it easy for the other crew to secure the line.

Depending on the size and material used for your heaving line, you may want to wet it down, to give it some weight and make it easier to heave.

A critical task to be performed at this stage, requires you to tend the line, to make sure enough slack exists to avoid yanking the line off the disabled boat before her crew can secure it, and to make sure that excessive slack does not permit the line to be sucked into your boat's screw(s).

Depending on how the towline is attached to your boat, you may need to attach the towline to your bridle, or rig it to a Samson Post or appropriate tow cleat.

Keep the helmsman informed of how things are proceeding on the other boat, whether they have been able to properly and safely secure the line to their post or cleat(s), and whether the line on your end is ready to begin towing.

As the helmsman eases your boat ahead, begin to pay out towline from your boat until the appropriate length is deployed. Advise the helmsman when the slack is about to be totally paid out. Sea conditions, wind, chop and the predicted length of tow time will all affect how much line to pay out. You want enough to allow some catenary (dip) in the line, to serve as a shock-absorber. For tows that take some time, be prepared to rig chafing gear on your boat, to protect your towline and/or bridle from chafe damage.

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