

## WE PICK UP STICKS!



**LAKE MURRAY, S.C.-** When U.S. Army 360<sup>th</sup> Civil Affairs Brigade paratroopers execute a jump, they are called “sticks” by fellow soldiers, possibly because of the multiple jumps and precise timing out of the aircraft. Or, it may be that they just look like sticks as they exit the aircraft one after another.

The “sticks” jumped out of an Air Force C-17 Globemaster III air transport at 11:00 a.m., on September 12, 2009, in a series of passes on the drop zone at Lake Murray. Dubbed “Operation Back in Black” by the Army, this occasion commemorated the final group jump of the 360<sup>th</sup> airborne paratroopers since the group will soon be disbanded and transferred to other Army units. Following this final jump as a member of the 360<sup>th</sup> Civil Affairs Brigade, the paratroopers were required to turn in their paratrooper maroon berets in exchange for the generic Army black berets. They will be “Back in Black.”

The large aircraft flying low over the lake was a sensational sight for spectators as it dropped the paratroopers at 1,250 feet into the 85 degree water. According to the Jumpmaster, the aircraft made six passes over the Lake, and a total of 78 paratroopers dropped like sticks from the plane. Not a common sight!

United States Coast Guard Auxiliary members from Flotillas 12-3, Lake Murray, 12-1, Lake Marion, 12-6, East Cooper, 12-8, Charleston and 12-12, Edisto Island launched support vessels from Flotilla Island as the primary retrieval boats. Richard Miner, Flotilla Commander for Lake Murray, S.C., Flotilla 12-3 recalled, “This is the most number of Lake



**Photos This Page:**  
**LAKE MURRAY, S.C.- A “stick” of Army paratroopers jumps out of an Air Force C-17 Globemaster III air transport on September 12, 2009.**

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Murray Auxiliary (operational) facilities that I can recall in one mission at one time.”

Activity began at 7:30 a.m. with operational vessels and participants arriving by land and water. Vessels from Lexington County Sheriff's Office, Richland County Sheriff's Office and Department of Natural Resources also assisted and provided a much needed safety zone perimeter on this busy Saturday. It was an impressive assembly of more than two dozen participating operational facilities rafted up at Flotilla Island for the early morning multi-agency briefing.

Tasked with the prompt and safe retrieval of soldiers and their equipment, Auxiliary vessels worked quickly to pick up and transfer the soldiers and their gear from the drop zone to nearby pontoon boats.



**Perry Moses, coxswain and Joe Livingston, crew, from Flotilla 12-1 maneuver their facility the *Reel Thrill* to permit the Army swimmer to retrieve a U.S. Army paratrooper and gear from the water. Also on board but not visible is Larry Odom, crewmember, also from FL 12-1.**

Each Auxiliary vessel carried an Army safety swimmer on board, a big help in hauling in the wet and heavy parachutes. The paratroopers would be helped aboard only after the chute was retrieved. They then sat on the chutes to save deck space. A quick transfer of the soldiers and equipment was made to pontoon boats operated by private volunteers. Timing was critical for the boats to be back in position along the drop zone before the aircraft made another approach with the next group of “sticks” jumping out.



**Don Davis from FL 12-3 and James Ramsey, FL 12-6 coordinate multi-agency radio communication procedures for operational briefing to all agencies.**

A steady flow of pontoon boats ferried the wet soldiers and their equipment to Pine Island where waiting family and friends greeted them at the commemorative ceremonies. Several hundred attended the party to celebrate the group jump and the history of the 360<sup>th</sup>.

Aboard the Auxiliary Tactical Communications vessel, *Sherry-Lynne*, Auxiliarists Jerry Ruschkofski and Russ Jernigan, Flotilla 12-3, coordinated the action and details between the aircraft, vessels and radio base station located at Flotilla Island. Also aboard the Patrol Command Vessel were MSGT Nick Vidrine, U.S. Army 360<sup>th</sup> CA Jumpmaster, two Army personnel, and BMC Travis Andrews, USCG Station Charleston, Auxiliary Liaison Officer.

MSGT Vidrine said, “I would like to express my gratitude to the Coast Guard Auxiliary for their support in this mission and its successful finish. The Auxiliary provided the main boats for the retrieval of the soldiers and their gear, and it was not completely without risk. Thank you all for your participation, we are grateful.”

For our part, the Coast Guard Auxiliary was proud to be a part of this historic event and honored to pick up their “sticks.”



*Story and photos by Barbara Burchfield, FSO-PA 12-3*