



Members of the Lake Murray Coast Guard Auxiliary participating in a joint exercise with the South Carolina Civil Air Patrol are shown aboard an Auxiliary vessel used to carry CAP cadets to an island on Lake Murray to search for the location of a fake helicopter crash. Above are, first row, left to right - Joe Richbourg and Ed Jones. Second row - George Crouch, Steve Davis and Dale Owen.

Coast Guard Auxiliary aids Civil Air Patrol in exercise

By Ollie Moya

Editor in Chief

Members of the Lake Murray Coast Guard Auxiliary and the South Carolina Civil Air Patrol, operating out of the Columbia Airport, combined for a successful joint exercise on Lake Murray on Saturday (Nov. 17), which resulted in locating a fake helicopter crash on Goat Island.

The exercise's scenario called for the CAP unit to locate a reported "downed" helicopter somewhere between Columbia and Greenville. The Lake Murray Coast Guard Auxiliary's role was to hide an emergency location beacon, similar to the units carried aboard all private aircraft in the United States, at a position of their

choosing somewhere on Lake Murray.

That morning, operating from Flotilla's 12-3's base at Flotilla Island, the unit's operating officer, George Crouch, and his team, including former commander Joe Richbourg, Ed Jones and Dale Owen, chose to plant the beacon somewhere on Goat Island.

"They don't even know the beacon has been put on Lake Murray," informed Steve Davis, one of the Auxiliary's communications authorities that participated in the exercise from the radio watch position.

He explained that after the CAP launches the mission aircraft from the Columbia airport, they'd pick up signals from the

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emergency location beacon.

"They'll have to triangulate, which means they'll actually take readings from three locations and then plot them on a map," he said. "Where the points cross on the map is the approximate location of the beacon."

Once the approximate position is established in the air, they'll radio the ground search team, composed primarily of CAP cadets, who will come to an approximate location given by the air patrol.

With the beacon emitting signals from Goat Island, the readings in the air could have been interpreted as coming from nearby Pine Island or as far away as Land's End, according to Davis.

Using hand-held equipment, the senior ground officer and his team of cadets will more accurately define the location. Once they determined the unit was sending signals from Goat Island, the Coast Guard Auxiliary unit was contacted, and boats operated by coxswains Crouch and Owen carried the CAP ground unit searchers to Goat Island.

"We picked up the CAP ground team and carried them to the island, and they actually searched the island until they located the transmitter which we had hidden earlier in the day," said Crouch.

The procedure utilized during the practice scenario is typically used by the CAP to locate downed aircraft.

The CAP holds training exercises every month. This is only the second time the Lake Murray Coast Guard Auxiliary has been extended an invitation to participate. Two months ago, the Coast Guard Auxiliary hid the emergency location beacon on an island near Timberlake Plantation.

"I think what has drawn the two groups together is our improved communications capabilities," speculated Davis, who three years ago began leading an effort to build a better radio communications network at Flotilla Island.

"All the Civil Air Patrol Aircraft now have our operating channels and they know that we have a Civil Air Force repeater on Little Mountain," added Davis. "Through our improved communications system, we now have a lot better coordination."

George Summer, who annually logs thousands of man-hours from his residence as a radio watch stander, participated in the exercise from his home. Summer is a member of both the Lake Murray Coast Guard Auxiliary and the Civil Air Patrol.

Two other members of the Lake Murray Coast Guard Auxiliary, Michael Mikutaitis and Boykin Rosenbourg, also are members of the Civil Air Patrol and participated in the exercise—as members of the CAP team.

"I think the exercise is a good thing," said Crouch.

"It is pulling the two groups together. Both our groups are composed of volunteers. Joining together in training gives us exposure to their side and it gives them exposure to our side."

The exercise involving locating the fake helicopter crash on Lake Murray was only one of several exercises conducted by the CAP that day. Under the supervision of Col. Bob Townsend of Charleston, who oversees the Air Patrol in seven states, including South Carolina, similar training scenarios were devised for situations at Columbia-Owens Downtown Airport, at the Congaree National Swamp and over I-26 south.

The state's Civil Air Patrol is made up of 600 members and 400 cadets. The Air Patrol has 10 planes dispersed over the state.

More than 80 members participated in the drills, meant to sharpen their skills for dealing with potential disasters. The state's Air Patrol also has a role in coastal evacuations during hurricanes, monitoring traffic bottlenecks and other problems from the air.