



KEEPING IT TIGHT, a Coast Guardsman takes in slack on the tow line connecting his 41-foot patrol boat and the 44-foot motor lifeboat.



THROTTLING UP the forty-one's engines, BM3 Timothy Martin takes the patrol boat out the channel leading from the Coast Guard's Oak Island station to the Intracoastal Waterway.

Law Enforcement Is Major Mission

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jobs to get hand-on practice in each of the rescue procedures: experience that could make the difference between life and death for a stricken vessel at sea.

"People assume that the Coast Guard's primary mission is search and rescue," said Chief Arndt in the warm, dry comfort of his station office. "But that's not really the case. Our main mission has always been law enforcement."

The Coast Guard's direct ancestor, the Revenue Cutter Service, was established under the U.S. Treasury Department in 1790 to control rampant rum smuggling. It wasn't until 1915, when it merged with the Life-Saving Service, that the Coast Guard took on its new name and rescue duties.

As America's primary maritime law enforcement agency, the Coast Guard interdicts smugglers and ille-

gal immigrants, enforces federal fisheries regulations up to 200 miles at sea and assists local, state and federal law enforcement agencies in marine-related investigations and arrests.

The Coast Guard's duties have expanded over the years to include port security, waterway management, oil-spill clean-up supervision and maintenance of the nation's lighthouses and nearly 100,000 aids to navigation.

Most boaters think of the Coast Guard as a maritime 911 service: the agency to call in case of an emergency on the water. And it is. But the Coast Guard's search and rescue role has changed in recent years.

"We will always respond immediately to a legitimate marine emergency, such as a fire, a boat taking on water, a person lost overboard or to any vessel in imminent danger

due to severe weather conditions," Arndt said. "But we are not a towing service for boats that have simply gone aground or run out of gas on a nice summer day."

The Coast Guard used to routinely handle such non-emergency calls. But with its expanding law-enforcement duties and only 38,000 uniformed personnel—fewer than the New York City Police Department—the Coast Guard has been directed by Congress to focus its energies where they are most needed, Arndt said.

Search and rescue operations are now governed nationwide by the Marine Assistance Radio Broadcast (MARB) policy, under which the Coast Guard answers all radio calls for assistance on the water but physically responds only to emergency situations.

If a breakdown or minor ground- (See SEARCH, Page 16)

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