

Thanks To Rescuers, It's Safer To Go Into The Waters

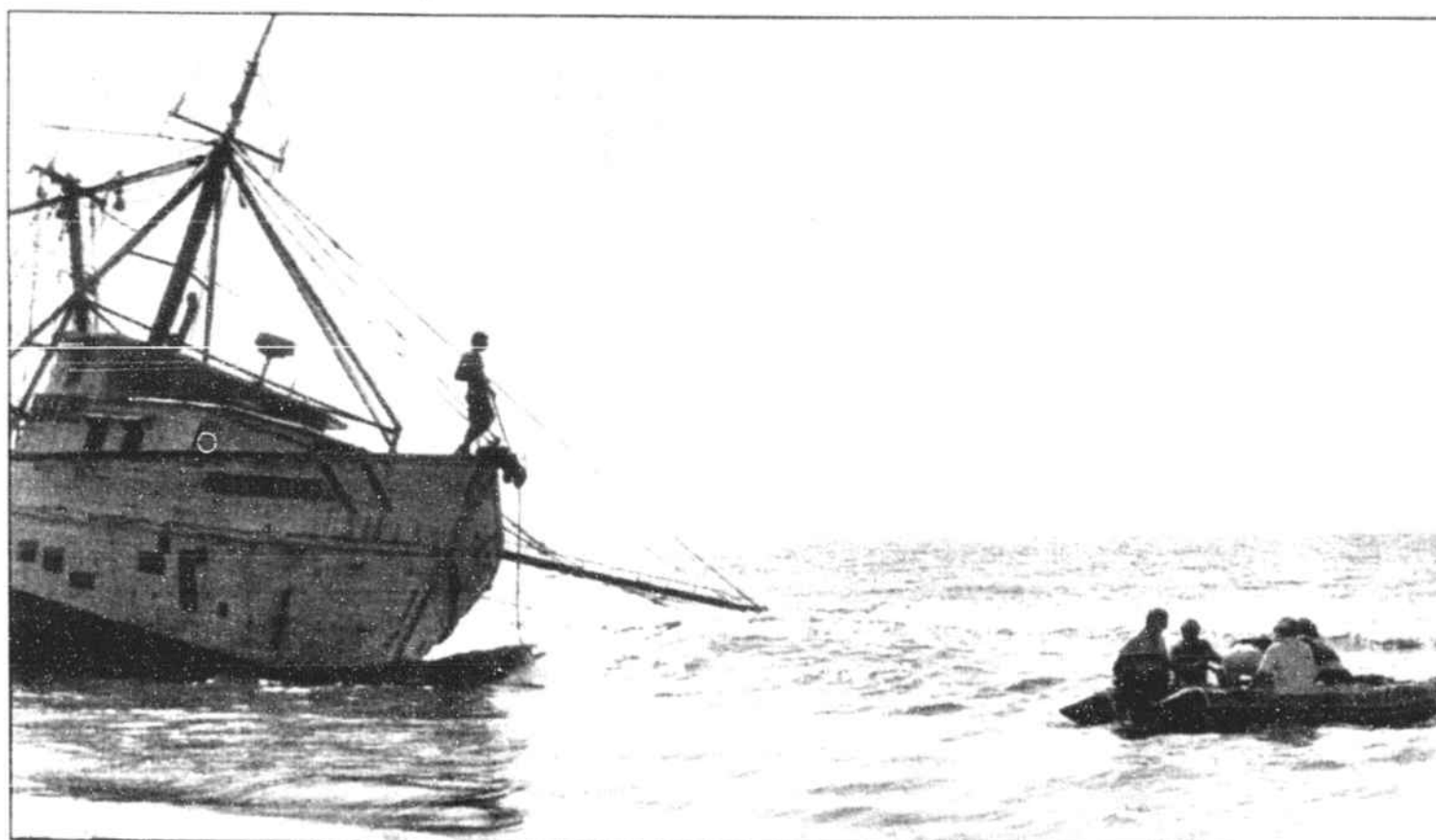
BY MARJORIE MEGIVERN

Kids are playing with a Frisbee on Holden Beach—a common sight, a favorite pastime. The Frisbee sails into the surf and two youngsters dart after it, only to be pulled out into the choppy waters beyond their depth. Four adults on shore race in after them and suffer the same fate. Soon, one Frisbee toss has put seven people in danger of drowning.

To the rescue quickly come two men in an inflatable boat, alerted by a 911 call from onlookers. They speed to the area where the seven have gone down and, in moments, have them all in the boat, gasping for breath, but alive and safe.

This is one case from the files of the Holden Beach water rescue group that has made the ocean and waterway much safer for everyone over the past five years. Trained water rescue personnel there now know how to save boaters and swimmers in a variety of situations.

"We have 15 people who were trained by Preston Coby, a Florida trainer with the Florida Public Safety Department," explained Tri-Beach Fire Chief Doug Todd in Holden Beach. His men had followed in the footsteps of the Ocean



AN OIB RESCUE team in its inflatable boat, comes to the assistance in September, 1993, of a shrimp trawler that went ashore and broke up on Sunset Beach.

STAFF PHOTO BY ERIC CARLSON

Isle Beach Fire Department, whose members received this training two years earlier.

"We had seen situations where we could get to people quick in a

six-man boat," said OIB Fire Chief Dave Harrell. "About 14 of our people took the three-day training course eight years ago and have had another session since then." The

\$1,000-per-day training and other rescue expenses are funded there by the town and the Ocean Isle Beach Property Owners Association.

Instruction included rescue work in all kinds of water and depth, both shore-based and boat-based. "Shore-based training included throwing rope bags, using fire hoses, doing all sorts of things without having to get in the water," Todd said. "However, this method hasn't been used much. Most rescues occur farther out in the water."

Also included in the training was how to stay calm and how to talk to people in the water to calm them.

Harrell said his team had 35 calls the first year, mostly during the tourist season. "We get a lot of calls in the fall, too," he said. "People get tangled in nets, kids drift off-shore on rafts, and visitors have trouble in rental sailboats they don't know how to operate. There are lots of problems on personal watercraft, too, and we've found several overdue night boaters. There have been no fatalities in Ocean Isle Beach waters. We've been able to get many people off capsized boats."

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His group is responsible for monitoring the waters from Shallotte Inlet to Little River, while the Tri-Beach crew takes care of the area from the Shallotte River to Long Beach. Harrell said the furthest their boat has gone for rescue was three miles. "Farther than that, the Coast Guard handles it," he said.

The procedure is that onlookers on shore can call 911 to report a problem, or those in jeopardy on a radio-equipped boat can signal the Coast Guard, too distant for immediate help, who make the 911 call. Instantly, all rescue workers' pagers are activated and they spring into action.

"We have a Suburban equipped medically," he explained, "and a four-wheel-drive Blazer; our inflatable boat is kept in the fire station in the middle of the island. Within six or seven minutes we can be at the scene of trouble."

The Tri-Beach team, under the jurisdiction of the fire department, may have a slightly longer response time, as that area reaches to Long Beach, where there is no such rescue capability. "It might take 20 to 30 minutes to get there," Todd said. "Long Beach is considering training its own people."

He said Holden workers had about 30 calls their first year in operation, but they went down a little the next year. "After a visiting young man drowned here that year," Todd said, "the town put out lots of publicity on safety procedures. Also, weather plays a part; the second year we didn't have as many dangerous rip currents."

The aforementioned drowning drew OIB rescue workers to assist. In fact, these two teams are always ready to help each other and to cover Sunset Beach waters, since no trained water rescue group is in place there.

"Four years ago, we had four drownings," Todd went on, "all of them visitors. Another rescue we missed was on Long Beach, when a fisherman went overboard. There was a delay in our getting that call."

In their first year, however, they succeeded in pulling out of the water the seven people mentioned earlier who had chased a Frisbee into the surf off the east end of Holden Beach.

Their equipment includes two boats, a four-meter Avon with a fiberglass bottom and center console, and a 380 inflatable fire rescue boat.

Harrell and Todd are firmly convinced of the value of their rescue teams, although volunteers are few in number, forcing many to put in 30 hours a week. "I know we've made a big difference in peoples' lives," Harrell said. "They sure are glad to see us coming."

Anyone willing to give a few hours a week to assist the rescue effort can call Harrell at 579-3594 or Todd at 842-7021. Harrell said they need not be prepared to train for water rescue, but could relieve others for this duty by serving as dispatchers or in other roles at the fire stations.

HOLDEN BEACH MARINA SOLVES BOATERS' PROBLEMS

Many boaters love the thrill of boating and fishing but hate the hassle of storing their boat, towing their boat to the beach and launching and loading in the strong current. Gary Carr, general manager of Holden Beach Marina, is focused on one thing. "Taking the hassle out of boating." Gary has identified five problems that boaters experience and offers his solutions.

PROBLEM #1. Storing your boat at home exposes it to the leaves and pine needles found in most yards. A boat will catch a pine needle from a tree 300 yards away and that pine needle will find your bilge pump. Also, most people do not have a locked yard or someone to look after their boat when they are not home.

HBM SOLUTION#2. HBM buildings and gates are locked and secured with an alarm system and security lights. Storage areas have limited entry during operating hours and the only trees we have are palm trees.

PROBLEM #2. Towing your boat to the beach wears out your vehicle, uses more gas and you have an increased chance of an accident or breakdown. Trailers rust in a few years, and it is almost impossible to keep brakes on a trailer. Does your trailer have brakes?

HBM SOLUTION: Sell your trailer or, better yet, when you buy a boat, save the cost of a trailer. HBM Storage Customers never need a trailer because we do all the launching and pulling you will ever need. We make driving to the beach a pleasure instead of a hassle.

PROBLEM #3. Launching and loading your boat from a trailer is difficult in the current with an experienced crew. By yourself it is dangerous and often exposes your vehicle to salt water.

HBM SOLUTION: We launch and retrieve your boat with our giant \$100,000 fork lift. All you do is make one phone call and we launch your boat, start the engine, fill with fuel or ice, etc. When you arrive at HBM, you park your car, get in your boat and do your thing whether boating or fishing. We will even

tell you where and when the fish are biting. When you get done, park your boat at our dock, and lower your antennas as your signal to us you are done for the day. We lift your boat, wash the outside, flush your engine and put your boat on your rack.

PROBLEM #4. It is no surprise to boaters that boats and motors sometimes breakdown. How many weekends have been ruined because of breakdowns? And how many times has your boat been partially fixed by shade tree mechanics?

HBM SOLUTION: We have factory trained technicians and Mike Potts, our service manager, to save the day for you and to have your boat ready for you when you return to the beach. HBM can repair almost any boat and motor.

PROBLEM #5. If you keep your boat in the water, you must keep it painted with toxic paint. Yearly sanding and painting of your boat is expensive and adds pollutants to the water.

HBM SOLUTION: When you expose your boat to salt water only when you use it, your equipment will last longer and it will be better for the environment. Storage when not in use is the answer to small boats.

Holden Beach Marina is dedicated to helping boaters enjoy their experience at the beach. Our friendly receptionists provide you with weather information, fishing information and you can file your float plan with us. We monitor VHF 16, so if you need assistance or need to make a phone call, we are available.

We publish a newsletter keeping you informed of the happenings at the beach such as dredging, inlet condition, fishing and helpful hints.

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