

Think Outside the Boat

Story and photos by PA2 Bobby Nash, PADET Jacksonville, Fla.

SAVANNAH, Ga. -- The Coast Guard is constantly looking to find new ways to meet the commandant's challenge of "all hazards, all threats." Sometimes that means thinking outside of the boat, and that's just what Marine Safety Unit Savannah is doing with its vertical delivery program.

"The vertical delivery capability is an alternative to imposing delays on vessels that need an offshore boarding prior to entrance to port," said Lt. Kevin Lynn, chief of response for MSU Savannah. "In some cases, sea conditions are such that while surface assets can operate offshore, it is not safe to embark or disembark a boarding team to the deep draft vessel. If such weather conditions are predicted to persist, we look to the vertical delivery capability to accomplish the mission and minimize the delay imposed on the vessel. This allows us to maintain a high level of port security while facilitating commerce."



SAVANNAH, Ga. --Petty Officer 2nd Class Will Sims, a Marine Safety Unit Savannah boarding team member, gives the signal that he has landed safely aboard the Coast Guard Cutter *Elm* during a security exercise off the coast of Savannah. Coast Guard photograph by PA2 Bobby Nash.

MSU Savannah was using vertical delivery several years ago but lost the capability during transfer seasons and the program slid to the back burner. Now they have 10 highly trained professionals willing and able to do the job.

The training includes two fully involved days of helicopter egress training in a pool, learning how to be hoisted down from a helicopter and then practical exercises from different altitudes.

MSU Savannah keeps their skills sharp through real world applications and training. One training evolution involved the Georgia National Guard's 4th Civil Support Team (WMD) from Dobbins Air Reserve Base in Marietta, Ga. Coast Guard helicopters from Air Station Savannah picked up the 4th CST and boarding team members from MSU Savannah and took them to the Coast Guard Cutter *Elm*, from Atlantic Beach, N.C.

The Coast Guard and the 4th CST, a joint Air National Guard and Army National Guard team, were testing their ability to respond to the detection of radioactive material aboard a ship trying to enter the

Port of Savannah. The cutter *Elm* was role playing as the commercial ship with the radioactive material on board.

Team members from the 4th CST were responsible for finding and identifying the source of the radioactive material. The team then provided guidance for how to respond and the potential impact of the substance.



SAVANNAH, Ga. -- A Coast Guard boarding team member from Marine Safety Unit Savannah is lowered to the Coast Guard Cutter Elm during a security exercise off the coast of Savannah March 15. Coast Guard photograph by PA2 Bobby Nash.

Training alone, a true professional, does not make. That's why the team members at MSU Savannah are true professionals. MSU Savannah has used their vertical delivery capability twice since it was reborn in early spring 2007.

"We've done two actual missions on tank ships off the coast of Savannah," said Lynn. According to Lynn the vertical delivery went smoothly and the Coast Guard minimized the delay of the ship because of how the boarding team was transported to the ship.

Cooperation and teamwork are the key ingredients to the success of MSU Savannah's vertical delivery program.

"We had full cooperation from Station Tybee, Ga.," said Lynn when asked about a successful boarding of a tank ship off the coast of Savannah.

With a unit like MSU Savannah in America's arsenal, it won't be long before the Coast Guard meets the challenge of "all hazards, all threats."

USCG