

The Officers, Directors and Members of
US SAILING
are pleased to present the
ARTHUR B. HANSON RESCUE MEDAL
to the crew of

PRESTO

for the rescue as follows:

On October 19, 2001, two miles off Berkeley, CA in San Francisco Bay, Captain Ray H. Wichmann was teaching reefing and unreefing class on board a J/24, with students Magdalena Yesil, Amy Slater, and Katie Hope, when they passed a small sailing dinghy with two people onboard. It had only a few inches of freeboard and Captain Wichmann commented that with the wind building rapidly, that boat should head to shore. The air temperature was 53-degrees and the water temperature was 57-degrees.

A few minutes later Hope, who was standing in the companionway, facing aft said, "Look! That dinghy just capsized!" Captain Wichmann took the helm, gybed around, and came up to close-hauled. Presto was back to the dinghy within three minutes.

They found a man and a woman in the water, holding on to their upset dinghy, each with one arm through a Type 2 PFD. There was a lot of gear floating in the water around them. Presto came to a stop to leeward of the dinghy to avoid drifting down and getting tangled in the flotsam. The woman immediately grabbed hold of Presto's cockpit gunwale, while Slater and Captain Wichmann struggled to lift her the two-foot elevation from the water, eventually pulling her aboard. Presto drifted away during this recovery, then sailed back, again struggling eventually pulling the man aboard.

The victims were put below, out of the wind, removed some of their wet clothes and wrapped in spare sails. Yesil and Slater pulled down the jib, they started the engine, and motored in. From there, the school's office staff took great care of the unfortunate sailors. Another instructor and Captain Wichmann returned to the scene in the school's Whaler to salvage the dinghy. In the 30 to 40 minutes that had elapsed since it had capsized, the dinghy had been carried by the ebb current about 1/4 of a mile toward Alcatraz. They gathered up all the gear, got the dinghy in tow, and returned it all to the launch ramp.

To Captain Ray H. Wichmann, Magdalena Yesil, Amy Slater, and Katie Hope in Presto, for recognizing a developing dangerous situation, reacting quickly to rescue two souls, treating the early hypothermia, then returning to clear the waterway of a navigational hazard, US SAILING is pleased to present the Arthur B. Hanson Rescue Medal.

Ronald C. Trossbach
Chairman, Safety at Sea Committee
By Direction

The Arthur B. Hanson Rescue Medal was presented to Captain Ray Wichmann during the US SAILING Board Meeting, Thursday October 17, 2002, by Chair Ron Trossbach.

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presto1.jpg (49819 bytes)

Left to Right: Glenn McCarthy, Amy Slater, Captain Ray Wichmann.

Left to Right: Amy Slater, Captain Ray Wichmann, Glenn McCarthy.
Ken Signorello, Photographer

DETAILS:

Hi Janine (Ahmed Connelly, Nominator) --

While doing overboard recoveries during the CI Course that Ally audited out here, I talked about the last rescue I had done and that I had written a letter to Latitude 38 (the local sailing magazine).

SOMETIMES YOU'RE LUCKY

by

CAPT. RAY H. WICHMANN

I've often joked with my students about how OCSC spares no expense to simulate reality. Last Friday, 19OCT, it was no simulation! It was a regular afternoon Bay Review and three students were on board, Magdalena Yesil, Amy Slater, and Katie Hope. For more than 2/3s of the completely windless Bay Review, we had been slowly motoring practicing reefing and unreefing. Finally, the wind began to blow just enough for us to actually sail.

In the vicinity of AX@ buoy (about 2 miles out from OCSC) we passed a small sailing dinghy with two people aboard. It had only a few inches of freeboard and I casually said to my students, If I were in that boat, I'd be on my way back in now. Just a few minutes later Katie (who was standing in the companionway, facing aft), said Look! That dinghy just capsized! I took the helm, we gybed around, and came up to close-hauled. We were back to the dinghy within three minutes.

There we found a man and a woman in the water, holding on to their upset dinghy, each with one arm through a TYPE 2 PFD. There was a lot of gear floating in the water around them so I brought our J/24 to a stop to leeward (the opposite of our regular Overboard Recovery training) because I did not want to drift down and get entangled in all the flotsam. The woman immediately grabbed hold of our cockpit gunwale and Amy and I were able to pull her aboard. We drifted away while struggling to get her onto the deck, then returned, and pulled the man aboard.

We put them below, out of the wind, got them out of some of their wet clothes and wrapped in spare sails. Magdalena and Amy pulled down the jib, we started the engine, and motored in. Max and the office staff took great care of the unfortunate sailors from there. David Gatton and I went back out in the Club's Whaler to salvage the dinghy. In the 30 to 40 minutes that had elapsed since it had capsized, the dinghy had been carried by the ebb current about 1/4 of a mile toward Alcatraz. We were able to gather up all the gear, get the dinghy in tow, and return it all to the launch ramp.

I think there are several lessons for us to learn from this event:

1. Conditions and situations can change very quickly. For these two people, it went from BORING to life threatening in about 5 minutes.
2. It is hard to pull someone out of the water and up onto the deck of a boat. We were on a J/24 and it is less than 2 feet from water level to deck level and it was VERY HARD to lift them up. If you cannot get someone aboard very quickly, get them attached to the boat!

3. Current had a much greater effect than the wind. The wind had come up to 5-7 knots from the West and the current was ebbing in that area at less than 2 a knot. With only their heads and a small part of the dinghy's gunwale above the water there was very little windage and the current easily carried them upwind. Remember this if you ever have to search for someone.

4. Being about 2 miles (and increasing) from shore and with so little showing above the water, they might not have been seen if we hadn't just happened to be close by.

Those boaters were indeed very lucky!!

Ray