

The Officers, Directors and Members of

US SAILING

are pleased to present the

ARTHUR B. HANSON RESCUE MEDAL

to

RICHARD R. ELLEDGE

FOR THE RESCUE AS FOLLOWS:

As reported by Richard R. Elledge in an Incident Report
to the Chicago Yacht Club Mackinac Committee

Alibi, a Tartan 10, was entered in the 1994 Chicago-Mackinac Island Race with Richard R. Elledge of Chicago, Illinois, as skipper.

Only July 23, 1994 at about 22:35 hours, Alibi was near the rhumb line (Chicago - Point Betsie) on port tack, beam reaching under spinnaker and mainsail. Course was 20 degrees magnetic, apparent wind was steady at approximately 15 M.P.H.; speed was registering 7.0 to 8.0 M.P.H. on her log. There were small (approximately two foot) following waves. She was sailing comfortably, on her feet, with no control problems.

The midnight watch (R.R.E., H.L. and M.G.) had gone below at approximately 20:45 p.m. leaving C.N. (watch captain), J.L., J.O'C. and the navigator, A.B., on deck. As that watch progressed, dark masses of clouds were observed across the horizon from, generally, the northwest to the northeast, with vivid lightning displays. In the immediate vicinity, the sky was clear but a distinct black cloud was approaching from the north/northwest. The crew on deck had put on their foul weather gear (but not their PFD's) and were watching several boats some distance ahead expecting them to provide warning of the approaching foul weather and to signal time to strike the spinnaker.

At approximately 22:35 hours, the boat was hit with a strong gust which put the boat on her ear followed by a wind shift (a header) which clocked very quickly to the south of east and then apparently shifted quickly back to the west. No rain was associated with this squall, nor was a wind line observed on the water nor did it appear to have affected the boats ahead.

Initially, the gust knocked the boat down. As she righted herself, the boat bore off and the crew below started coming up. C.N. (who had been handling the spinnaker sheet from the portside mid-cockpit) eased the spinnaker sheet, released the main sheet and, observing that J.L. was casting off the spinnaker guy, stood up preparing to step forward and across the cockpit to the spinnaker halyard cleat. At that moment, the boat jibed and the boom struck C.N.'s right shoulder, knocking him out of the cockpit, over the lifelines and into the water.

H.L., coming on deck and facing C.N., saw the incident and shouted "Man Overboard" several times. J.L. moved immediately to the stern, located C.N. in the water and threw the horseshoe, with strobe light and MOB pole attached, towards C.N. He then stood at the aft pulpit pointing at C.N. in the water and continued to do so. At the same time, the navigator, A.B., recorded the location on the loran (N. 42 degrees, 48.37 minutes - W. 87 degrees, 08.81 minutes). At the same time, J.O'C. on the tiller, headed the boat into the wind to stop the boat. The spinnaker and main were taken down and secured. R.R.E. started the engine and took the tiller.

As the boat started to turn back, the crew lost sight of C.N., either because a larger boat passed between C.N. and Alibi or (more likely) when C.N. ducked underwater to remove his foul weather boots. J. L. continued to point in the direction where he had last seen C.N., using Alibi's MOB strobe light in the water as a reference point. After, perhaps a minute or two, C.N. was seen waving his personal MOB light. Alibi then motored down to him, made a starboard turn into the wind and was laid alongside of C.N. J.O'C. reached down and grabbed the suspenders of C.N.'s foul weather pants and C.N. grabbed the toe rail.

With some difficulty, the crew managed to drag C.N. up onto the deck. As several of the crew maintained grips on various pieces of C.N.'s clothing and C.N. maintained his grip with both hands on the toe rail, the Lifesling was passed around his back and under his arms and the D rings were brought together. The block and tackle which is carried in the Lifesling bag was then used to get his shoulders above deck level, CN shifted his grip to the lifelines, his legs were lifted by his trouser legs and he was rolled under the lifelines.

During this period, while C.N. was being recovered from the water, Witch-Craft, a T-10, came alongside, offered assistance and stood by as the operation was completed. Witch-Craft advised that she had recovered Alibi's MOB pole, strobe light and horseshoe. During the same period, another T-10, Invention, sailed over to ask if assistance was needed.

Once C.N. was on the deck, he was taken below, bundled up in a berth with sleeping bags and treated for shock. Although he was experiencing pain in his arm and shoulder, the extent of his injury was not then known.

Thereupon, Alibi proceeded under motor and main towards Racine, Wisconsin, which was approximately 33 miles distant. The attending Coast Guard Ship, Katmai Bay, was radioed on Channel 9, to advise of this incident and that Alibi had withdrawn from the race. In Racine harbor, Alibi was met by paramedics who took C.N. to a local hospital where he was x-rayed, treated for a broken collar bone and released.

As reported by Richard R. Elledge, August 30, 1994

Dear (Mackinac Committee Chair) Ruth Ann Moorman:

I apologize for the delay in submitting this Report concerning the injury and MOB incident on Alibi during the Chicago to Mackinac Island Race. I discussed the incident, informally, with Vlad Kobal and reviewed a draft of this Report with him.

I have given considerable thought to this incident and I do have comments.

First, the MOB drill. We had done our "full crew" drill the prior morning. Everyone on Alibi believes that it made a difference - and may have been the difference. We thank you and your predecessors for insisting on a current full crew practice.

Second, the MOB equipment. We had a horseshoe with drogue, light and pole attached (which was thrown toward our MOB) and the life sling, with block and tackle (which was used to get our MOB up on deck). Our MOB never saw the horseshoe, light and pole...it just wasn't close enough and, he says, he never thought to look for it. Our spotter threw the horseshoe, etc. as quickly as he could but had to fumble for several seconds to get the pole free. The top of the pole was in a cloth sleeve with snaps on the backstay and the butt of the pole was in a cup-like affair with an open ring. (Both items are in the West catalog.) I would suggest that 11.52 needs further consideration. The high likelihood of some amount of fumbling, resulting in the loss of a few critical seconds, tends to off-set the desirability of both a daytime and a nighttime locator attached to the horseshoe. I suggest that two devices attached to the horseshoe are one too many. I would opt to keep the light and eliminate the pole. Next year, I may install the Survival Technology MOM module (with inflatables) which releases everything with one pull.

Third, and most important, the PFD issue. The MOB was my watch captain, an experienced sailor, who is both sure footed and careful. He always brings his own PFD, an inflatable harness. (Alibi had a full supply of PFD's but I encourage the crew to bring their own - one that fits. I pass out lights and whistles at the beginning of the race.) The specific reason he did not have his PFD on was simply because it was still warm and the storm seemed still to be some distance away. Therefore, although he had put on his foul weather pants, he just had not put on the jacket yet, and he wears the harness over his jacket in bad weather.

The general reason he wasn't wearing a PFD at 10:35 p.m. reflects, I believe, a pervasive attitude within the fleet that (i) PFD's are a bit of a nuisance to wear and (ii) when I need it, I'll have enough time to put it on. Demonstrably, most of the time most people on most boats sailing in Area III events do not wear PFD's. It is just not done.

The only thing I can think to do about a dangerous, but general, practice is to talk about it. I enclose a copy of a letter written, originally, to the members of Columbia Yacht Club in the Columbia "Binnacle". I am sending a copy to Don Glasell offering it for publication in the LMSRF newsletter. If you believe it should be offered to American Sailor, please feel free to do so.

As reported by Richard R. Elledge, August 30, 1994

Dear Friend:

As some of you may have heard, one of my crew went overboard in the middle of the night during the Chicago-Mackinac Race this year. We were under spinnaker. A strong gust, followed by a wind shift resulted in a jibe which caught him standing in the mid-cockpit. The boom hit his right shoulder, broke his collar bone and knocked him over the lifelines into the water. It was a very sobering experience for me and my crew, despite the happy ending. We were all very lucky! We did get back to him in time, we got him out of the water ourselves and we took him into Racine without further incident. He tells me his collar bone is mending nicely without much discomfort or inconvenience.

Since all of you are boaters, let me share a couple of observations with you. First, practicing the "man overboard drill" does pay off. We had done a "full crew" MOB drill the prior morning. We are all convinced that this made a significant difference. The initial response should be almost instinctive and almost immediate: throw flotation; record position on Loran; someone stand clear to maintain eye contact with the MOB and point at him; stop the boat. Quickness is essential! In the end, experience and teamwork will get the job done, but the prior drills will get the job started faster...and a couple of seconds can make a huge difference in the dead of night when the boat is moving away from the MOB at approximately 12 feet per second.

The most troubling aspect of this incident concerns PFD's. The crew member who went in the water that night uses an inflatable/harness PFD and generally wears it over his foul weather jacket. It was a beautiful warm night in mid-lake with lightning on the horizon and stars overhead. He was sitting in mid-cockpit wearing his foul weather pants with his jacket and his PFD by his foot. He just hadn't put them on yet. Then the blast hit, there was a jibe and he was in the water, treading water, with no PFD on.

Let's acknowledge the facts. We all stumble sometimes. We all misjudge a wave sometimes. Every year experienced sailors do slip, trip or get knocked overboard into Lake Michigan. Three people went overboard during the 1994 Mac - at night and not wearing PFDs. A young man went overboard during the Mac several years ago - at night and not wearing a PFD. A very capable sailor went overboard during the 1992 Chicago Waukegan race and she was not wearing a PFD.

And let's acknowledge what the general practice is out on the lake. We all have PFD's with us when we sail, but most of the time most of us don't wear them. Our general attitude seems to be that (i) we'll put it on "when conditions warrant" but (ii) conditions don't warrant, yet. I believe that there is a problem with our attitude and the problem is that attitude.

I would suggest that we need to adjust our attitude. We need to temper our confidence with a realistic fear of the unexpected. No one expects to go overboard, but every year someone does. Sooner or later, we're going to lose that someone. And it could be someone for whose safety you or I were responsible, either directly (crew) or indirectly (by example).

Regards,
Richard R. Elledge,
Commodore

As reported by James Webb (Witchcraft T-10), January 22, 1998

In a flash of lightning, Jim observed the boat ahead, Alibi (T-10), get knocked down and ordered his chute doused. As they continued North, Jim glanced down at the water and thought he saw what seemed to be a face. He shined the flash light on it and it was! There were a number of MOB lights in the water in the area. Jim had to finish dousing sails in order to make recovery and came back to the face in a tie with Alibi. Witchcraft stood by as Charlie Noble was recovered by Alibi. Shortly thereafter Invention another T-10 came over to ask if assistance was required. Afterwards, Jim and crew picked up a number of flashing strobes returned to the owners at the finish line except one of which did not have identification and Jim kept!

**The Arthur B. Hanson Rescue Medal was awarded to
Richard R. Elledge as a result of this rescue event.**