

# THE COXSWAIN SHACK

By: Bob Peterson, Coxswain / QE / Air Observer, Flotilla 19, 11th Northern November, 2000

## Remembering Clyde Thornley

By now, I suspect that most of you have heard the sad news that Clyde Thornley passed away a month ago, of a heart attack, while vacationing in Mexico. To be sure, one never is fully prepared to accept such news, regardless of the deceased's prior state of health. But when I think back about Clyde, I always come to the same conclusion: He was too young, too fit, and too healthy to be taken from us. As they say, you never know.

Hopefully the shore side and on-the-water tributes for Clyde went well (this is being written just before both services). Anyone who rises to the ranks of Flotilla Commander deserves credit for their accomplishments. To have done so while earning AUXOP, Coxswain and QE designations gives some indication of his skill and competence.

Clyde joined Flotilla 19 on July 2, 1991, his Catalina-38 sloop "Solitude" as his facility. Only a month later, he qualified as an Instructor, and distinguished himself as one of our best. He qualified as Boat Crew in 1992, Operator in 1993 and Coxswain in 1994. He completed his "cornerstone trio qualification" in '93 by qualifying as a Courtesy Examiner. Unlike some who earn all three, but spend most of their time in a single cornerstone activity, Clyde was very adept and active in all three, earning certificates and awards for his productive work, teaching, examining and patrolling.

Clyde completed all seven Specialty Courses and earned the coveted AUXOP award in March of 1994, less than three years from enrollment! He was active in our land-mobile call-out program as "Coyote Point Mobile 33". We missed him immensely when he and Sue moved up to Sacramento and Clyde transferred into Flotilla 33.

Clyde served our flotilla, division and district well, accepting staff positions in PE, IS, OP and MA. He was elected to VFC for 1993 and served an exceptional tour as FC in 1994.

Having established himself as a "triple threat man" in teaching, examining and patrolling, all the while, doing battle with AUXMIS as SO- and FSO-IS, what impressed most of us was his mastery of all of these different skills. So thus far, other than supplying some specific dates to attach to his accomplishments, I haven't really recounted anything about Clyde that wasn't well known.

I can correct that oversight by recalling Clyde's leadership skills in two quite different settings, that stand out in my mind as documentation of his superior talents and dedication to our organization. I confess I don't recall the exact dates of either event, but that doesn't matter; what does matter was Clyde's display of cool, calm competency, whether in the face of bureaucratic gymnastics or nasty seas offshore.

Any of you remember the notorious "Tiger Teams" of the mid-1990's? They were appointed by DIRAUX and DCO to reexamine the way the Auxiliary was organized and the way we did business. At the direction of CHDIRAUX and NACO, various districts were requested to research various issues that were perceived as frustrating (and thus limiting) members' accomplishments.

Not surprisingly, Clyde's intelligence, deductive abilities, and interpersonal skills shined brightly as he and other members examined our administrative policies and his team recommended several streamlining ideas. He holds a special place in my Hall of Auxiliary Heroes for the exceptional work he undertook and convincingly presented in the assignment.

Of course, my fondest memories of Clyde and I suspect most of us, recall Clyde's time at the helm of a boat. The fact that Clyde held more OPS-8 certificates than anyone else I knew (permitting him to skipper others' boats) was strong testament to his acknowledged competence. The fact that, once he set his mind to it, he earned his professional mariners Captain's License in two months was another.

My most profound memory of Clyde as a skipper goes back to that time when Clyde, Jeff Ekhardt and I sailed Norm Kaufman's 28-foot Bayliner up the coast from Morro Bay to San Francisco, in some of the roughest seas I've ever seen. A few years earlier, Clyde and I had joined Norm and Nancy as they powered the "Heart Throb" down the coast after their move to San Luis Obispo. It had been an uneventful trip. But we all enjoyed the chance to practice our navigation and seamanship skills, and the memory of a wonderful dinner in Monterey remains in my memory as the highlight of that cruise.

But on the return trip, when the Kaufman's moved back to the Bay Area, Norm's health precluded his joining us, so Jeff Ekhardt, Clyde and I jumped at the chance for some more offshore time. It was late in the year and the seas were nasty. You know how it is; we had taken time off from work and needed to try to make the trip in the allotted time. So we shoved off from Morro Bay and took over a week to make it North in some of the nastiest seas and winds I've ever experienced. Clyde stepped up to the task, established himself as "in charge" and monitored every decision until we safely reached port. My memory of Clyde, at the flying bridge helm of the boat, with blue water flying over him remains indelibly etched in my mind.

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