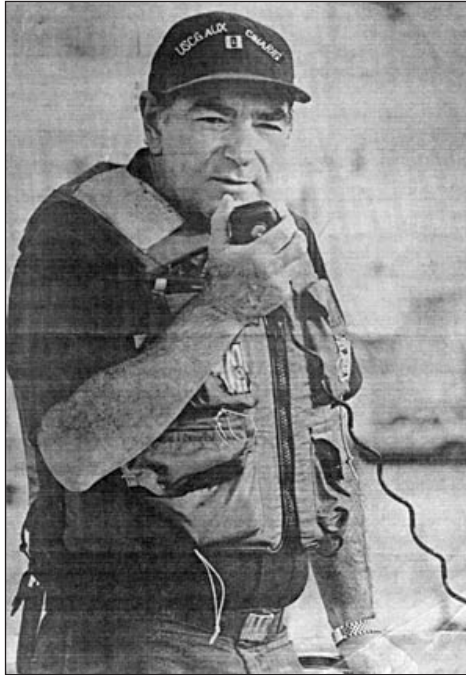


35 Years of Unwavering Dedication

Story by PA3 Barry Jeffrey Bena, District Seven Public Affairs

He saved countless lives in almost four decades of work, at sea and on land. He coordinated numerous coastal clean-ups and helped develop and implement Saturday night Auxiliary patrols. He stood communications watch at Coast Guard Station Miami Beach, Fla., for the past 12 years, and served as an instructor for Team Coordination Training, communications and coastal piloting.

Joel Aberbach, a Coast Guard Auxiliarist, uses his marine radio while on an Auxiliary patrol in his boat, the Cinarig, back in 1992. Aberbach has been volunteering with the Auxiliary conducting patrols, public education and various other water safety activities for more than 35 years and is presently the Auxiliary Division Six captain. (Photo courtesy of the Miami Herald)



Joel Aberbach is the Coast Guard Auxiliary Division Six captain and a dedicated volunteer.

He has been with the Auxiliary for nearly 35 years, but his nautical life began much earlier when he was very young. At age 10, his father bought him his very first Hallicrafter radio.

“I’d spend hours every day sitting on the porch listening to marine communications on the Jersey coast,” said Aberbach. When he turned 15, he became the proud owner of his first boat. At 21, he heard his nation calling and committed to six years in the Air Force Reserve. Though he enjoyed the Air Force, had he known a little more about the Coast Guard he probably would have joined it instead.

Shortly after his tour with the Air Force, Aberbach attended an Auxiliary safe boating course. There he

met Paul Singer, a certified teacher, and one of his inspirations for joining the all-volunteer service.

“He was as good as any college professor I’ve ever had,” said Aberbach. “I thought I’d like to do exactly what he’s doing.” Aberbach joined the Auxiliary in 1972, at age 37.

In addition to his volunteer life, Aberbach and his wife Beverly ran a custom picture framing supply store in Miami Beach for 41 years.

“I love being in business ... I love working with people,” he said. Aberbach was very busy juggling the business, family life and volunteering in the Auxiliary, which was a difficult task he began with open arms.

One of the first Auxiliary functions Aberbach took part in was the Flotilla Raft-Up in 1974. The Raft-Up took place on Picnic Island, which is on the Miami Intracoastal Waterway. The project has developed into a county wide clean-up known as Baynanza.

“Initially we worked with just the City of Miami,” Aberbach said. “It is now a county wide program that boasts nearly 1500 volunteers each year.”

“He is very, very involved in environmental protection such as the Sea Partners program and coastal clean-ups,” said Vickie Aponte, the District Seven Auxiliary affairs officer.

Since the Auxiliary is the volunteer arm of the Coast Guard, Aberbach has worked alongside active-duty personnel protecting our borders and assisting law enforcement patrols.

Aberbach recalls an intense case in 1987 where he responded to reports of two boats with Haitian migrants aboard. Always ready, Aberbach and his boatcrew were underway within one hour and quickly found the two migrant boats roughly 10 miles off Miami Beach.

“Joel has logged a lot of patrol hours since he first started,” said Aponte. In addition to the boat operations and beach clean-ups, Aberbach also contributes behind the scenes. Aberbach has volunteered to assist active-duty personnel cover radio watch every week for the past 13 years. Watchstanders listen 24/7 for distress calls from mariners.

“The crew loves having him here,” said Lt. John Corbett, commanding officer of Station Miami Beach. “He’s more than a co-worker to them, he’s a friend.”

He encouraged the City of Miami Beach to re-dedicate the first inhabited building in Miami Beach, Coast Guard Station Biscayne, which prior to 1915 was known as the Federal Life Saving Station. Another accomplishment of Aberbach’s was in helping create America’s Waterway Watch. Additionally, following the events of Sept. 11, Aberbach worked with Cmdr. Armin Cate under the direction and authority of the Marine Safety Office Miami commanding officer, then Capt. James Watson.

“Within ten days, we developed Operation On Guard, which was adopted by the District Seven command and the State of Florida,” said Aberbach. Operation On Guard was a local program in which mariners are able to report any suspicious activity on the water to authorities. The Operation On Guard plan was so successful that it spawned six or seven similar plans that later merged with the national campaign to become today’s America’s Waterway Watch.



Aberbach teaches a mother and her daughter the importance of keeping our environment clean at the International Coastal Cleanup. For the past 35 years, Aberbach has taken a very active role in marine protection and environmental clean-ups so that future generations can enjoy it as well. (Photo by PA3 Barry Bena)

Aberbach has served in a marine safety staff position with the Auxiliary Seventh District for two years and as an assistant for five years with his primary focus being environmental protection and maritime domain awareness.

“What I do is because I enjoy it,” Aberbach said. He is the primary liaison between the Sector Miami command and Division Six Auxiliary.

“During his tenure as division captain, he was sent to Guantanamo Naval Base to teach team-coordination training to Coast Guard and Navy personnel,” Aponte said.

Aberbach has served with the Auxiliary for 35 years and plans to continue his commitment for as long as they will have him.

“I swear, he’s like family, I hope he never retires,” said Corbett.