

CITATION TO ACCOMPANY  
THE ASSOCIATION FOR RESCUE AT SEA  
SILVER MEDAL

Auxiliarist William “Mac” Shepard is cited for outstanding operational skill while at the helm of Auxiliary Facility 194323, the MAC-ATTACK, during a rescue in the Gulf of Mexico on 24 May 2008. The crew, consisting of Jeffrey Brooks, Robert Wells, Edward Parish, and William Winfrey, performed anchoring training and then traveled to St. Andrew’s Bay for a multi-mission patrol. Several small boats were stopped and children under the age of nine wearing life jackets were presented with a “I Got Caught... Wearing My Life Jacket” cards were handed out, entitling the child to a free drink from local vendors. While the safety patrol was being conducted, a 59 year old woman was being pushed out to sea by a rip current just south of Laguna Beach. A 36 year old male swam to the victim but, instead of being a savior, he also became a victim of the rip current and heavy surf. As they were pushed further from the shore, relatives lost sight of them and reported it to the Beach Patrol. The crew of the MAC-ATTACK received the swimmer in distress broadcast, stating the swimmers were in the Gulf of Mexico, just south of Laguna Beach. MAC-ATTACK was turned south for the 12 mile trip and arrived moments before the CG-41495 utility boat from Station Panama City. While the CG-41495 performed a vector search, the MAC-ATTACK conducted a parallel track pattern. A USCG Dolphin, USCG Falcon, and local law enforcement joined the search. After several hours, Auxiliarist Shepard transitioned the boat to a multi-unit parallel track pattern closer to shore. Running outside the breaking surf, the crew of the MAC-ATTACK noted a Panama City Beach Patrol vehicle flashing its light toward them. Moving even closer to shore, Auxiliarist Shepard began a careful approach to the breaking surf, a location that could easily cause the boat to capsize. The approach allowed the crew members to spot the two missing swimmers holding on to a small float board. With Auxiliarist Brooks providing specific guidance, Auxiliarist Shepard slowly nosed the boat forward until Auxiliarist Wells could attempt to throw the victims a line. The throw was on its mark and Auxiliarist Shepard began to slowly back the boat out of the dangerous surf line, avoiding erratic movements as the exhausted swimmers were being towed along to safer waters. Although the seas were still running 2 to 3 feet away from the surf line, the swimmers were pulled around to the swim platform where Auxiliarists Winfrey and Parish brought them safely on board even though they were barely able to assist with the effort. When one of the swimmers began exhibiting signs of shock, both were covered with blankets and given water. Auxiliarist Shepard guided the MAC-ATTACK to Lighthouse Marina where the victims were reunited with their relatives. The actions of Auxiliarist Shepard and the MAC-ATTACK crew are most heartily commended and in keeping with the highest traditions of the United States Coast Guard.

## Summary of Actions:

Saturday, May 25 marked the beginning of the long Memorial Day weekend, and hundreds of boaters were out on St. Andrew's Bay, and thousands more locals and visitors took advantage of the warm temperatures and sunny skies.

Auxiliary facility 194323 (MAC-ATTACK), owned and helmed by William "Mac" Shepard, began a routine Marine Observation (safety) and Operations Training mission at 1400 hours. Jeffrey Brooks served as the Coxswain on board, and Robert Wells was a Crew member along with Shepard. Edward Parish and William E. Winfrey were also aboard as Crew Break-ins. After a brief anchoring training evolution in the waters north of the Hathaway Bridge, the team headed south to the St. Andrew's Bay entrance channel where they encountered 4 – 5' seas caused by a SW 10 kt. wind opposing a falling tide, and 2 – 3' seas offshore in the Gulf of Mexico. Most boaters had wisely stayed in the Bay, and the patrol reentered the pass and cruised behind Shell Island.

Several small boats were stopped and children under nine years old wearing life jackets were presented with an "I got CAUGHT ... wearing my life jacket" card entitling them to a free Jr. Frosty at Bay County Wendy food outlets. The cards were produced by the Bay County Marine Law Enforcement Alliance (the USCG and the Auxiliary are members) as part of the National Safe Boating Week (NSBW) promotion to encourage the wearing of life jackets.

While patrolling the relatively calm Bay waters, the crew was alerted to a "swimmer in distress" Search & Rescue (SAR) mission in the Gulf just south of Laguna Beach, a distance of about 12 nm west of the pass. Responding immediately, the crew proceeded at the fastest speed possible across the Gulf and arrived on scene several minutes before the USCG utility boat 41495 arrived. 495 began a sector search (VS) and instructed the Auxiliarists to run a parallel track pattern (PS) along the beach to the west. Shortly thereafter, Rescue 6589, a USCG Dolphin HH-65A helicopter, arrived and began a parallel track search, and was joined an hour later by Rescue 2121, a Falcon HU-25 jet out of Sector Mobile, who also began running a parallel track over a much larger area. Both were later joined by a Bay County Sheriffs' Office (BCSO) Bell Jet Ranger helicopter that flew independent patterns, concentrating on the surf line.

After several hours of searching without success, CG 495 and AUX 323 transitioned to a multi unit parallel track pattern (PM) with the Auxiliary vessel running behind and closer to shore than the CG boat, just a short distance outside the breaking surf. Proceeding west bound, Brooks observed a Panama City Beach (PCB) Beach Patrol vehicle flashing his spotlight at them, and ordered the helmsman to turn toward shore. Approaching the surf line, the crew spotted an exhausted male and female clinging to a small float board adjacent to the breaking surf. Brooks instructed Shepard to approach the pair cautiously, aware that if the facility entered the surf it could capsize and additional casualties would result.

Shepard nosed the vessel forward to within 10' of the surf, and Wells accurately threw a line directly to the pair. As Shepard slowly backed the vessel away from danger, Wells pulled the two swimmers along the side of the boat to the swim platform where Winfrey, assisted by Parish, pulled them both from the water. With seas still running 2 – 3' on the stern, this was no small feat and required a great deal of agility and strength. Neither swimmer suffered any injuries, but the male began exhibiting signs of

shock and first aid in the form of blankets and water was administered by the crew. After notifying Station Panama City (STAPC) of the rescue, 323 transported the victims to Lighthouse Marina in Grand Lagoon where both were eventually reunited with their families.

Interviewing the victims, both from different areas of Georgia, enroute to safe harbor, the crew learned of the cause of their distress. The 57 year old female had been floating on her board in shallow water near shore when the rip current rapidly pulled her offshore beyond the breakers. She appropriately went with the current and swam parallel to shore to break the hold it had on her, but was then unable to break back through the surf to return to shore. Her nine year old granddaughter witnessed the event, and after waiting a short time, approached a nearby adult male and told him her grandmother was in trouble and hadn't returned to the beach – training she had received in her swimming class at home.

The 36 year old male entered the water and swam to the initial victim, and was also unable to get back through the surf to the beach. He stated they were able to touch bottom briefly as the surge subsided, but were repeatedly pulled seaward with each subsequent wave. They were in the surf zone for almost 30 minutes, trying to swim to shore, and were extremely exhausted by the time the crew spotted them. The male was barely able to assist with the effort to get him onto the swim platform and over the transom into the boat.

The Panama City News Herald captured the severity of the problem with the Sunday morning headline “**1 missing, 45 rescued from gulf**”. The article stated that strong rip currents that sucked swimmers out to sea were to blame. “Saturday began with yellow flags that were changed to red at 2 p.m., then again to double red about 4 p.m. A red flag means there is strong surf and currents, while double red means the water is closed to the public. Officials tried to change the flags to double red earlier in the day, but rescuing distressed swimmers took them away from that task.”

The Auxiliary crew responded appropriate and effectively,

Continuation of CG-1650, Block 13

Additional Nominees:

Brooks, R. Jeffrey 1181355

Wells, Robert O. 1168568

Parish, E. Walker 1223591

Winfrey, William E. 1228389

June 24, 2009

To Whom It May Concern:

This is a letter of recommendation for the Rescue at Sea Silver Award for the actions of the crew of Auxiliary facility 194323 on Saturday, May 15, 2008 in saving the lives of two distressed swimmers. The crew consisted of the following individuals:

<b><u>Crew</u></b>	<b><u>Member ID#</u></b>
Jeffrey R. Brooks	1181355
Edward W. (Walker) Parish	1223591
William M. (Mac) Shepard	1219410
Robert O. (Bob) Wells	1168568
William E. (Bill) Winfrey	1228389

Their actions and the specifics of the event are described in attached documents. Thank you for your consideration.

Gerald A. Marano  
Flotilla Commander  
USCG Auxiliary  
08CR Flotilla 19  
Panama City Beach, FL