

Station Tybee Island Helps Marshals Take Down Fugitive

Story and photos by PA1 Donnie Brzuska, PADET Jacksonville, Fla.

SAVANNAH, Ga. – Petty Officer 3rd Class William Peternel, a three-year veteran of the Coast Guard, showed up to Station Tybee Island, Ga., Jan. 11, 2006, expecting a normal day. He put his gear in his duty room, started boat checks at “0700 sharp” and was able to squeeze in time for a cup of coffee.

He had know idea that just up the river from the station Dennis Wayne Harvey, Jr., a wanted fugitive who had recently been featured on America’s Most Wanted’s “15-Seconds of Shame,” was working on the fishing vessel Michael Lyn.

Harvey was wanted for four car jackings, two charges of aggravated assault in which one car jacking victim was shot in the chest and another was severely beaten, and kidnapping. Police say Harvey racked up this laundry list of charges on the afternoon of Nov. 3, 2006, stunning residents of Austin, Texas.

All Harvey needed was “15-seconds of Shame” for a tipster to recognize the fugitive and point the cops in his direction. The U.S. Marshals Service Southeast Regional Fugitive Task Force, Savannah Office used the tip to generate information that the Texas fugitive was working on the Michael Lyn.

Supervisory Deputy Marshal Tommy Long of the Southeast Regional Fugitive Task Force contacted the executive petty officer of Station Tybee Island, Chief Petty Officer Larry Zeruth. The station’s officer in charge, Chief Petty Officer James Bodenrader, assembled two, four-person boat crews to help the Marshals, which included Peternel as coxswain for one of the boats.

“Once we found out, we formulated a game plan. One crew would approach the vessel and come off as doing a normal fisheries boarding. My crew and three deputy marshals were to stay behind out of sight,” said Peternel.

The idea was to use the first vessel, piloted by Chief Petty Officer Van Horton, as a decoy to get the crew of the Michael Lyn, including Harvey, mustered on the bow of the fishing vessel.



Petty Officer 3rd Class William Peternel of Coast Guard Station Tybee Island was the coxswain of one of the 25-foot response boats that helped U.S. Marshals apprehend Dennis Wayne Harvey, a fugitive wanted in Texas for several violent crimes. Coast Guard photograph by PA1 Donnie Brzuska, PADET Jacksonville, Fla.

The Coast Guard boat crews and Marshals got underway expecting a lengthy search for the Michael Lyn. The Marshal's had information that the boat usually fished off the coast of Hilton Head, S.C., which is a least a 45-minute trip from the station, but fate would deal the law enforcement teams a different hand that day.



Petty Officer 3rd Class Chad Schrayner and Petty Officer 3rd Class William Peternel of Coast Guard Station Tybee Island help U.S. Marshals take Dennis Wayne Harvey in to custody. Harvey is wanted for a series of violent car jackings in Austin, Texas, in November 2006. Photo courtesy U.S. Marshals Service.

“We got to the mouth of the Savannah River, and there they were with their gear down only 10-minutes from the station,” said Long. “All the Marshals were a little disappointed. We were hoping we get a little longer ride on those souped up boats the Coast Guard has.”

After the crew of the Michael Lyn was mustered on bow, the decoy boat gave the signal that it was safe for the Marshals and the second Coast Guard boat crew to make a move. Peternel and his crew sped up to the stern of the vessel out of sight of the crew of the Michael Lyn to allow the Marshals to jump aboard the fishing vessel.

“Three Marshals jumped aboard the vessel and ran to the bow of the vessel with their guns drawn. Harvey saw them and put his hands up. He had no where to go,” said Long.

The Marshals wanted to catch Harvey at sea to isolate him and minimize his ability to flee possibly resulting in more needless violence, said Long.

Harvey was transferred to one of the waiting 25-foot homeland security response boats from Station Tybee Island and is currently awaiting trial for the charges against him.

The Marshals were so impressed by the Coast Guard boat crews that assisted them in the apprehension of Harvey they presented both boat crews with a plaque recognizing their efforts.

In a letter to Capt. John Cameron, commanding officer of Coast Guard Sector Charleston, Station Tybee Island's parent command, the head Marshal for the Southeast Regional Fugitive Task Force, Savannah Office, Marshal James Roberts, Jr., recognized each of the individuals in the boat crew.

“(The U.S. Marshals) would not have been able to close this case as rapidly and with such ease without (Station Tybee Island's) excellent assistance. Thank you for fostering this attitude of positive interagency cooperation,” said Roberts in the letter.



Chief Petty Officer Van Horton of Coast Guard Station Tybee Island was the coxswain of one of the 25-foot response boats that helped U.S. Marshals apprehend Dennis Wayne Harvey, a fugitive wanted in Texas for several violent crimes. Coast Guard photograph by PA1 Donnie Brzuska, PADET Jacksonville, Fla.

The crew of Station Tybee Island was just glad they could help keep a potentially dangerous fugitive off the streets and met the challenge with the same ‘all-in-day’s-work’ attitude they meet other missions.

“Being in the Coast Guard, it’s our job to save lives, protect the public and bring people to justice. That’s what I joined to do, and it was great feeling to be able to help out in this case,” said Peternel.

There are approximately 50 personnel assigned to Coast Guard Station Tybee Island with an area of responsibility that extends from St. Helena Sound, S.C., to Sapelo Sound, Ga. The crew’s missions include homeland security, search and rescue, and law enforcement.

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