



(Left to Right) QM3 Clint Nelson, SN Fernando Partidavital and EN3 Josh Miller represent USS Hopper (DDG 70) in the COMDESRON 31 boat race May 4.

## RHIB race offers alternative training solutions, water fun

Photos and story by  
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At a time when Navy officials are trying to find the right balance between training and funding, the solution often lies in the challenge to "do more with less."

Commander Destroyer Squadron (COMDESRON) 31, Commodore Mark "Buzz" Buzby was dealing with just such a challenge recently. He was looking for a way to provide more underway training time for his Sailors and came up with the idea to provide training by using rigid hull inflatable boats (RHIBs).

"Junior officers in particular aren't getting the opportunities to practice maneuvering and formation like they used to, even just a few years ago. So, we'll just do the same maneuvers in RHIBs throughout Pearl Harbor and have some fun at it," Buzby said.

Last Friday, each DESRON ship entered a RHIB into a first-ever, friendly competition at Pearl Harbor. The event featured a high-speed race down the northeast side of Ford Island ending at the Adm. Clarey Bridge.

"It won't be the last either," said Buzby. "The points that were accrued by the winning boats are going to count towards the [annual] Admiral's Cup competition. It won't be just Surface Line Week any longer," he added.

According to Buzby, the results of the RHIB race will be combined with events such as weekly ship signal drills, divisional tactics (DIVTACs) and other professional competitions taking place in the coming months.

"I was very impressed - they did terrific," said Buzby. "For many of them, it was their first time out doing DIVTAC'S. [There were] a few rough spots here and there, but by the time we got done with it they were doing really, really well," said Buzby.

"We accomplished what we set out to do. [If] we get a collision out here in a RHIB it will bounce. Destroyers don't bounce," added Buzby.

In the end, the competition produced three winning teams. The high-speed race was won by what commodore Buzby

described as the "lightest" crew; weighing in at a mere 98 pounds apiece soaking wet, was the team from USS Hopper (DDG 70).

"The different DIVTACs during the event helped us remember which [boat] was which," said Ens. Courtney Rogers, Hopper's RHIB boat captain, about how the event helped with her professional development.

"I haven't had an opportunity to do DIVTACs before. I learned about them in surface warfare officers school, but it was all on a moboard, not ever on a ship," said Rogers. "It helps with my surface warfare officer (SWO) qualifications to get out in the RHIB and see what kinds of things you need to do and what kind of safety pre-cautions need to be taken to get my boat officer qualifications," she added.

In the maneuvering department, USS Russell (DDG 59) took top honors and proved the effectiveness of the first-of-its-kind competition.

The third and final award for "spirit of competition" award went to the crew of USS Fletcher (DD 992) after they changed into aloha style shirts and leis with straw hats before the start of the high-speed run.

Although it was unable to enter a RHIB into the competition, USS Paul Hamilton (DDG 60) showed its support by using a sailboat. The team effort earned the ship special recognition from the commodore.

After the competition, the Sailors relaxed and celebrated with a party at the Rainbow Bay Marina sponsored by the local Surface Navy Association (SNA).

The SNA chapter at Pearl Harbor was incorporated in 1985 to promote greater coordination and communication among those in the military, business, and academic communities who share a common interest in naval surface warfare and to support the activities of surface naval forces.

"We were all pretty rusty at DIVTACs," Buzby said to the competitors after the race. "But as we progressed through the afternoon, the crispness of the execution of the signals increased and I was very proud of how well you all did."



RHIB crews compete in the Destroyer Squadron 31 boat race May 4 on the northeast side of Ford Island, Pearl Harbor.



Above: Rear Adm. Robert T. Conway, Commander, Navy Region Hawaii, Commander, Naval Surface Group Middle Pacific, congratulates USS Russell's Ens. Phil Hochgesang, assistant CIC officer (left) and Lt. J. g. Mike Condrady, CIC officer (right) who participated in the COMDESRON 31 race.



Left: (Left to Right) Lt. j.g. Richard F. Marshall confers with Lt. j.g. John M. Montgomery during the COMDESRON 31 boat race May 4.