Capt. Joel Dolbeck, ’88, knows a Coast Guard Response Boat-Medium (RB-M) when he sees one. As project manager for the 45-foot RB-Ms, he might even see them in his sleep. So when he spotted an RB-M in the movie trailer for the newly released film, “The Adjustment Bureau,” Dolbeck knew instantly what he had seen.

Dolbeck sent a link to the trailer to Coast Guard Communications Manager Brian Olexy as some noteworthy publicity for the RB-M. And then came the bigger question: How did it wind up in the film?

“The primary reason for the Coast Guard presence in the film is story-driven,” said George Nolfi, director and writer of “The Adjustment Bureau.” “Matt Damon’s character, as a congressman from Brooklyn, has a large amount of waterfront in his district. He grew up a couple blocks from the docks in Red Hook, so it makes sense he would be concerned about terrorism and threats from the water. We thought it would make sense for him to be out on a Coast Guard boat.”

Nolfi wondered if taking a U.S. congressman out on a tour in New York Harbor would be something the Coast Guard might do. So he called his Coast Guard friend—Rear Adm. Peter Neffenger, the director of Coast Guard enterprise strategic management and doctrine.

Nolfi and Neffenger met when Neffenger was the Sector Commander for Coast Guard Sector Los Angeles-Long Beach. They collaborated on brainstorming realistic but out-of-the-box thinking to incorporate into Coast Guard exercises. Their friendship has continued even as Neffenger has been reassigned to Coast Guard Headquarters in Washington, D.C.

“George asked how the Coast Guard might interact with someone like Matt Damon’s character, a congressman running for Senate. And what types
of boats or cutters would operate in New York Harbor,” Neffenger said. “I explained that the Coast Guard could not support or provide backdrop for political campaigns. But as a sitting congressman, yes, we want our elected officials who represent our constituencies to be exposed to and be able to articulate what we do.”

“For a boat, something realistic would be a patrol boat, a Response Boat-Small (RB-S), utility boat, or one of our new boats like the RB-M,” Neffenger said. “I told him, ‘when you’re ready to do this, the people you want to talk to, who do this kind of stuff all the time, are our Motion Picture Office.’ I think George just wanted to get smarter about how we operate before he contacted them.”

Coast Guard Motion Picture and Television Office

So now that we’ve established how the Coast Guard came to be in “The Adjustment Bureau,” how about the RB-M specifically? That answer comes from the Coast Guard’s Motion Picture and Television Office (MOPIC) in Los Angeles.

“Oftentimes we work with a film that knows they want a Coast Guard presence, but they don’t know exactly what they want,” said Cmdr. Sean Carroll, ’94, who heads MOPIC. “In those cases, it’s up to us to educate them about the different assets based on availability, location and what lines up with their vision.”

For Sector New York, the available assets included a 110-foot patrol boat, a buoy tender, a 65-foot harbor tug and the RB-M.

Nolfi originally conceived the scene being filmed from the deck of the 110-foot cutter, shooting down on the RB-Ms in action. But they hadn’t seen all the boats in person yet. Carroll and his team arrived in New York City in September 2009 to help with the film.

They met the film crew, conducted a location scout and concluded they couldn’t get the shot that they wanted if they were shooting down from the deck of the cutter. So they made a course correction and used the RB-Ms exclusively—the one that had Damon, Nolfi, the production crew, and Sector New York Deputy Commander Capt. Greg Hitchen, ’87—as well as two other boats to get the shots they wanted. They began filming two days later.

What Did the Production Crew Think of the RB-M?

“We really liked the boat because it went so fast and it rode so smoothly. It really worked out well,” said producer Chris Moore. “It was a great shot and we felt fortunate to get it, especially on the first day of filming.”

Nolfi concurred. Though he has written scripts for several successful films, including “The Bourne Ultimatum” and “Ocean’s Twelve,” “The Adjustment Bureau” is the first film he directed. He felt fortunate to have the Coast Guard and the RB-M on the set with him.

“It was the first day of shooting on the film and this is the first film I’ve directed. So on day one, I see all these Coast Guardsmen ready to go and I thought, I’m in good hands,” Nolfi said. “And the RB-Ms are amazing boats. I’ll say just as a citizen, to see the capabilities that the boat and the Coast Guard have is impressive and reassuring.”

Popular Asset

“The Adjustment Bureau” isn’t the only production to show interest in the RB-M. In recent months, the boats have appeared on the new television series “Hawaii Five-0” and supported the show “America’s Most Wanted” with John Walsh.

Carroll understands why the RB-M is becoming a popular on-screen asset.

“From a movie producer’s perspective, the RB-M is such a great asset because it has a meaningful capacity to carry passengers and its appearance lends itself to what people
picture when they think of the 21st century Coast Guard,” Carroll said. “It gives you a lot more flexibility and options than our larger cutters, since it is so maneuverable and fast and can go in shallow water.”

The RB-M is growing in popularity, but Carroll said that the two biggest Coast Guard stars are the MH-65 Dolphin helicopter and the Defender-class RB-S. Their availability plays a part in their on-screen popularity.

“With the Dolphin helicopter and the RB-S, it’s not too difficult to find them carrying out their normal training and just ask them to allocate some hours in their training to the production,” Carroll said.

That gets at the function of MOPIC and how they work with Coast Guard stations and operators. Part of MOPIC’s job is to educate the public about what the Coast Guard does on a daily basis.

Film and television offer a large audience to showcase Coast Guard missions and assets. So MOPIC works closely with Hollywood production companies and directors to take advantage of these opportunities, while making sure they don’t interfere with operations or training.

To use “The Adjustment Bureau” as an example, the filming of the Coast Guard scene took between four and five hours in New York Harbor on the afternoon of Sept. 15, 2009. That same week, President Barack Obama came to New York City to open the New York Stock Exchange; later that week, a United Nations General Assembly meeting convened. Coast Guard Station New York was in high gear, though most people wouldn’t have sensed it.

“They were fantastic. Station New York handles all these responsibilities like it’s any other day,” Carroll said.

The RB-M in the Field

Dolbeck agrees that the RB-M is a good choice for a vessel that would take a congressman out for a tour. As a former executive officer at Integrated Support Command Miami, he set up similar kinds of tours.

“If you’re bringing political dignitaries on a Coast Guard asset, the
HDR is a proven AEC partner, providing more services to help the Department of Homeland Security meet the challenges of designing secure facilities for America’s front lines.
RB-M is an ideal choice because it carries out many of the Coast Guard missions,” Dolbeck said. “It is a multi-mission boat with an environmentally controlled cabin and it stays relatively close to port, which makes it available and comfortable.”

Dolbeck also pointed out that RB-Ms have been in full-rate production for about a year now and are becoming easier to find at Coast Guard stations.

“At full-rate production, we are delivering about 30 boats per year, out of two facilities in Kent, Wash., and Green Bay, Wis.,” Dolbeck said. “As a matter of fact, we just delivered two more RB-Ms, numbers two and three, to Sector Los Angeles-Long Beach, out near the motion picture office.”

It wouldn’t be a stretch to guess that the RB-M may be making more frequent big screen appearances.

“America’s Most Wanted” host John Walsh films an episode of the show on Jan. 6, 2011. The RB-M has been an in-demand asset for movie and television productions. USCG photo by Petty Officer 2nd Class Nick Ameen.

Return on Investment
Just to clarify, “The Adjustment Bureau” is not a movie about the Coast Guard. Although Hitchen briefly appears in the scene, the service is not mentioned in dialogue and it won’t likely figure into movie-goers’ overall impression of the film. But the scene, the Coast Guard and the RB-M made a big impression on the film’s crew and creative team.

“We had a great relationship and a really positive experience working with the Coast Guard,” Moore said.

Moore and Nolfi work in an industry that puts millions of viewers in front of a screen. But they capture the attention of an even wider audience with advertising on television, the Internet and other media, including advertising efforts like the movie trailer that originally caught Dolbeck’s eye.
Nolfi points out that tens of millions of dollars are being spent to advertise the film. And almost all of the television ads and the trailer have the Coast Guard RB-M scene in them.

“People see the film or the trailer and they say, ‘What is that? Wow, the Coast Guard!’” Neffenger said. “The fact that you are in a major motion picture gives legitimacy, a certain credibility, to your organization in and of itself. It attaches a certain status to it.”

With a new line of assets like the RB-M making their way into the field, and the connections and efforts of MOPIC to work with directors and production companies, the Coast Guard is helping to tell its own story to a growing audience.

“We can show them something of what the Coast Guard does on a daily basis and package it in a way that is engaging.”

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Book Review

“Atlantic: A vast ocean of a million stories,” Simon Winchester
by Jon Burden, ’81

As someone who graduated from an institution instilling a “liking for the sea and its lore”, I could not pass up Simon Winchester’s “Atlantic: A vast ocean of a million stories.” I was dubious that the author could fulfill his clam to tell the ENTIRE history of the ocean from its creation some 200 million years ago to its demise in some 250 million years. I am happy to report that he succeeds admirably.

After a brief geological explanation of the ocean’s creation, Winchester expertly tells how humans first ventured out of the relatively calm Mediterranean into the raging Atlantic. It was a desire for Haustellum brandaris, whose shells were needed to make a priceless purple dye, which inspired the seventh century BC Phoenician sailors “to grit their collective teeth and venture out into the deep waters of the greatest body of water it was then possible to imagine.”

We then proceed on a journey of discovery of the individuals who traversed the Atlantic, their origins and the technologies they used. Winchester makes it clear that these early explorers never “conquered” the ocean. They merely conquered their fear of it. He recounts the legend of the Irish Abbot St Brendan, who braved the storm tossed North Atlantic to bring Christianity to the Hebrides, Faroe Islands, Iceland and possibly Newfoundland in the sixth century AD. Another favorite story was how Gil Eannes, a personal service in the Portuguese court, used mathematics and his “feel for the sea” to do what the famous Henry the Navigator failed to do on fourteen occasions: pass Cape Bojador. In 1435, Eannes figure out how to use currents and the little wind available to manoeuvre around this cape just south of Morocco to make journeys along the African coast possible.

By the seventeenth century, scientists were following the explorers. The next two hundred years were filled with fascinating discoveries. The famous voyages of this era inspired NASA to name all five space shuttles after iconic ships of this time. But Mr. Winchester also brings to life the difficulties and follies: of sailors deserting in droves, of ships lost through incompetence, of local inhabitants attacked.

In the eighteenth century, the discoveries were used to turn the Atlantic into the superhighway of its day. While Benjamin Franklin was busy determining how best to get the post to and from Britain across the North Atlantic currents, numerous others were doing the same in the South Atlantic. But with the rise of trade came the rise of accidents, collisions and catastrophes. Of great interest to me was the contrast in fisheries management between the Grand Banks and the seas around South Georgia. Scientists provided recommendations for sustainable management of both these resources. Politics doomed the Grand Banks so that even today the cod have not returned while South Georgia remains teeming with Patagonian toothfish (aka Chilean sea bass).

The book concludes with the sobering reflection that most people now fly over the Atlantic. They have little connection to the ocean, seeing it only as a vast expanse of emptiness. Mr. Winchester provides worrying examples of how this “casual disdain” is leading to myriad and malign consequences. These show the vital role the Coast Guard has to play in protecting our environment and economic health.

After serving onboard the buoy tender USCGC Bittersweet and at a drug enforcement task force in New York City, Jon left the Coast Guard to study economics at the London School of Economics. Deciding to stay in London he became a project manager with Caradon Trend designing computerised control systems for heating and ventilation systems in commercial buildings. After 12 years on building sites, he joined Network Rail (owner of Britain’s railways) where he is involved in the £500 million redevelopment of the station. He still maintains a liking for the sea and its lore.
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Only one kind of auto insurance is earned once, but may be handed down for generations.
Donald L. Prince arrived at the Academy from Patterson, New Jersey in the summer of 1952, already an accomplished, award-winning, fly-fisherman. He switched from casting fishing lures to throwing the javelin for the Academy track team, and shooting bull’s-eyes for the pistol team. He spent his liberty time with his girlfriend, Dot, and soon after graduating with the class of 1956, they were married.

Don’s first assignment after finishing flight school in Corpus Christi, Texas in 1959 (USCG Aviator No. 801) was to Coast Guard Air Station Miami. There his mentor was the legendary Captain John “Muddy” Waters, USCG (Ret.) ’42, who was an expert on Search and Rescue and a very demanding instructor. Don greatly admired “Muddy” Waters and quickly became his disciple in order to become an outstanding search and rescue pilot himself. Years later Captain Waters would describe Don as “a sharp, cool-headed pilot.”

Don was next assigned to Coast Guard Air Station Argentia (Newfoundland). When he wasn’t flying patrols for the International Ice Patrol, Don found time to share his search and rescue expertise through the Academy’s Alumni Bulletin. His article on “Correct Search Planning”, published in the Nov-Dec 1962 issue emphasized avoiding wasted search time by devoting more time to drift computations. Six months later, in the May-Jun 1963 issue, he authored an article on aerial delivery of survival equipment from the HU-16E, entitled “Aerial Delivery from the HU-16E (UF2G)”. His final article, “Fatigue vs. Pilot Proficiency”, published in the May-Jun 1964 issue, addressed pilot fatigue, a frequent contributing cause to aircraft accidents. He criticized the conventional assumption that excessive flying was causing the fatigue and therefore assigning more pilots to each air station was the solution. He argued that the fatigue was caused by excessive administrative work load and that the solution would not be to add more pilots but rather to add one or two non-flying officers to handle much of the administrative work load, such as Administration Officer, Personnel Officer and Public Works Officer.

Still an avid and well-known fly-fisherman, fishing equipment manufacturers continually sent him new tackle and lures to try and to comment on. While assigned to Argentia Don took leave and fished the rivers on the west side of Newfoundland, near Harmon Air Force Base.

By the time he was transferred to Air Station San Francisco he was a skilled rescue pilot in the HU-16E, and the HC-130B. Air Station San Francisco had the new HH-52A amphibious helicopter and Don transitioned to it and soon qualified as an aircraft commander.

The winter of 1964-65 was a particularly bad one for northern California. Massive snows, followed by heavy rains that swelled the rivers, washed out roads and completely cut
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off many communities. The Eel River was well above the flood stage and local emergency services were overwhelmed. The Humboldt County Sheriff’s Office requested assistance from Coast Guard Air Station San Francisco to evacuate 16 stranded persons in danger of being engulfed by the rising waters on Cock Robin Island at the mouth of the Eel River. (Air Station Humboldt Bay would not be established until the 1970s.)

Commander Martin Kaiser, USCG (Ret.) ’55, who had served with Don in Argentia, also had transferred to San Francisco, and was serving as the Senior Duty Officer when the orders came in to send a helo to the Arcata Airport to assist in evacuating people stranded on an island and on rooftops by the severe flooding of the Eel River. Don Prince immediately volunteered, arguing that he was very familiar with the Eel River Valley, having recently fished for salmon there. Marty Kaiser cleared the assignment with the Operations Officer.

Don Prince would be the aircraft commander, Sub Lieutenant Allen Alltree, a Royal Canadian Navy exchange pilot, would be the copilot and James A. Nininger, Jr. would be the flight mechanic (hoist operator). Captain Marty Kaiser, remembers that “before every flight Don would pull out of his flight suit and quickly review his notes on the emergency procedures for the aircraft he was about to embark in.”

HH-52A CGNR 1363 departed San Francisco Air Station and proceeded to the Humboldt Bay area, approximately 200 miles to the north. CGNR 1363 was one of forty helicopters, military and commercial sent to lift people to safety. Prince’s helicopter barely made it to the Arcata Airport to assist in evacuating the islanders by the severe flooding of the Eel River. Don Prince immediately volunteered, arguing that he was very familiar with the Eel River Valley, having recently fished for salmon there. Marty Kaiser cleared the assignment with the Operations Officer. Don Prince would be the aircraft commander, Sub Lieutenant Allen Alltree, a Royal Canadian Navy exchange pilot, would be the copilot and James A. Nininger, Jr., would be the flight mechanic (hoist operator). Captain Marty Kaiser, remembers that “before every flight Don would pull out of his flight suit and quickly review his notes on the emergency procedures for the aircraft he was about to embark in.”

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Late in the afternoon, after having rescued a number of people from the raging flood waters, the helicopter landed five survivors at the Humboldt County Fairgrounds in Ferndale, CA. Mr. Arnold “Bud” Hansen, a local dairy farmer, volunteered to assist the Coast Guard crew in finding more neighbors before darkness made the searching impossible. CGNR 1363 would fly under extremely adverse weather conditions that would have grounded many helicopters. A Pacific Airline captain, flying over the area, reported the weather and turbulence as the worst he had experienced in thirteen years of flying. Don skillfully piloted his aircraft to Cock Robin Island and rescued ten persons before a lack of fuel forced him to proceed to Arcata Airport. After refueling, he immediately returned to the flooded area and resumed rescue operations. Several were hoisted while he hovered in 60-knot gusts of wind between high-tension power lines. Later, as darkness set in, he hoisted two adults and a child to safety. With the weather getting worse and the increasing darkness, most helicopter pilots probably would have shut down for the night and waited until the following morning to return to the Arcata Airport. But Don was confident in his abilities and headed toward the Arcata Airport, flying on instruments because of the low clouds and heavy rain. The Arcata radio beacon failed before the helicopter reached the field, and while attempting to come in on radio direction-finder bearings from the Flight Service Station at the Airport, he made several missed approaches to the field. On the final attempt a gust of wind blew the helicopter into the mountainous terrain east of the airport and the rotor struck the top of a redwood tree, causing the helicopter to crash, killing all seven aboard.

Killed in the crash were the pilot, LT Donald L. Prince; the copilot, Sub Lieutenant Allen L. Alltree, RCN; AE2 James A. Nininger, Jr.; civilian volunteer spotter, Arnold “Bud” Hansen, as well as the three flood victims they were transporting: Marie Bahnsen, Betty Kempf and her twenty-month-old daughter, Melanie Kempf, all of Ferndale. That night, having lost all contact with 1363, Coast Guard Air Station San Francisco made plans for a search.

The following day, Captain Ray Copin, USCG (Ret.) ’54 flew a HC-130, with a number of aircrew, to Arcata, landing in weather minimums to begin searching for clues as to the helicopter’s fate and location. An HU-16E followed with more personnel. They immediately
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met with FAA tower personnel at Arcata and with local persons to trace the whereabouts of 1365 and discover what had happened.

Later that day and into the night the aircrew, local Coast Guardsmen and civilian volunteers searched into the woods off a logging road based on guesses from various reports of people seeing lights and estimates of likely routes between the airport and the flood zone. The ground search was unsuccessful and it was nearly a week before the weather lifted enough for aerial searching that located the wreckage. Ground searchers, guided by a U.S. Navy helicopter, reached the crash scene on December 26, and reported all aboard were dead. On December 29th, Ray Copin was assigned to fly a C-130 to bring Don, his copilot and crewman home. He still vividly remembers taxing slowly to a stop at the San Francisco Air Station with the three flag draped caskets on the C-130 ramp, the air station personnel assembled nearby, and Captain Jim Maher, USCG (Ret) ‘44, the Executive Officer, offering prayers and remarks as the caskets were transferred to a waiting hearse.

Vice Admiral Clyde E. Robbins, USCG (Ret) ‘54 accompanied Don’s remains as well as his widow and children to New Jersey for burial near his parent’s home. He represented the Coast Guard as this aviation hero was laid to rest.

John “Muddy” Waters perhaps gave the best epitaph on Donald Prince’s career. “Don didn’t have to go out the day, but he went because people were in danger, and a job needed to be done. Eighteen other people are alive because he was there that day, and all of us who knew him will always remember a man who stood tall.”

Donald Prince, was awarded the Air Medal for his actions that day in rescuing victims of the flooding Eel River.

In 1977 Coast Guard Air Station Humboldt Bay was commissioned at Arcata, California. Its hangar was named in memory of LCDR Donald L. Prince (he had been selected for promotion when killed and advanced posthumously). Captain Roger Shannon represented the Class of 1956, which presented a marble memorial to their departed classmate. Over two hundred people attended the dedication, including Don’s widow Dottie and their two daughters. Vice Admiral Austin C. Wagner, USCG (Ret) ‘42, Commander, Pacific Area, presided at the commissioning and dedication. VADM Wagner flew to the ceremony aboard a HC-130 from Air Station San Francisco piloted by Commander Jarome Myers (‘60), with Commander Gilbert E. Brown, USCG (Ret) ‘56 as copilot.

In October of 1998, Air Station Humboldt Bay dedicated a memorial to those lost in the three fatal helicopter accidents that occurred in the area during rescue missions in horrific weather conditions. The crew of HH-52A CGNR 1363 is included. The memorial is in a lightly wooded area and includes a wooden building with an overhang beneath which one can stand and view three large cases containing mementos and descriptions of the helicopters and crews. Nearby is a small fountain with water flowing from eleven stone spheres representing the eleven pilots and crew members.

Since 1976 the LCDR Donald L. Prince Memorial Award has been awarded to the graduating cadet who is deemed most proficient in management. In 2008 he was inducted onto the Wall of Gallantry and the Wall of Remembrance in Chase Hall. At Coast Guard Air Station San Francisco he is also remembered in their memorial, dedicated in 2010.

In April of 2001 Canadian classmates of Sub Lieutenant Allen Alltree gathered at Air Station Humboldt Bay to pay homage to their classmate, who at age 23 gave his life saving others. About that same time the son of AE2 David Nininger, Jr.(who was 6 months of age at the time of his father’s death) established a $1,000 scholarship for students at Humboldt State University in memory of his father. The scholarship will give preference to Coast Guard members and their children.

Arnold “Bud” Hansen, the civilian volunteer spotter, was posthumously awarded the Coast Guard Public Service Award in 1998.

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3. Ibid.
4. Ibid.
5. Waters, op. cit., p. 141.
7. Ray Copin, e-mail to author, February 24, 2011
8. Waters, op. cit., p. 142.
10. Gib Brown, e-mail to author, February 9, 2011
12. Pterogram, June 2001
14. Pterogram, June 2001

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