

Did you see that private plane?

Chances are; it's on a Maritime Domain Awareness mission

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All across our coastal states, along our navigable waterways and large lakes you'll see the familiar blue and white racing stripe of the Coast Guard Auxiliary on recreational boats on patrol, helping to keep our recreational and commercial boaters safe.

In our marina's and ports, or on our coastal roads you'll find us in cars looking for the unusual, the out of place event, the specter of strange, performing Maritime Domain Awareness (MDA) patrols.

But did you see that private plane making long sweeps across the sky? Did you notice that in an area that doesn't get a lot of private planes, you always get one or two a day, at different times, and different planes? Is something sinister afoot?

We hope not, and that's why the Coast Guard Auxiliary Aviation (AUXAIR) detachments are patrolling the skies and looking for just that very thing – something sinister afoot.

March 9, 2005 - Marcos Island, TX – During an exercise involving the units of the Marco Island Police and Fire departments, the Isles of Capri Fire and Rescue Department, the Collier County Sheriff's Office, and the Civil Air Patrol, the AUXAIR units were called away to perform a live Search and Rescue in conjunction with a Coast Guard Cutter some 40 miles off Marco Island the Marco Island Eagle reported.

AUXAIR is active in every Coast Guard District, from Alaska to Hawaii. These Pilots, Observers and Air Crews fly their own planes and are reimbursed for fuel at set rates. Training (outside of Pilots independently earning their Pilot's Licenses) includes Emergency Egress, Swim Tests, Crew Resource Management, Spatial Disorientation and Search and Rescue – all similar to the Active Duty Coast Guard Pilots and Crews.

In addition to flying MDA patrols, our AUXAIR crews fly Ice Patrols (in the northern areas), Search and Rescue missions, logistical support, area familiarization rides and marine safety and environmental patrols. Each patrol consists of one or more pilots, and one or more members of the aircrew (either those designated AirCrew or as an Observer).

These trained individuals scan the sky, and the ground doing what our patrols do on the water, looking for the unusual. They also assist with coordination of ground units, seeing the big picture from high up in the sky.

March 25, 2005 – New York – Approximately 13,000 gallons of #2 diesel fuel that spilled into the Arthur Kill Waterway Thursday night after a tug and barge allided with a pier near the Motiva Sewaren facility in Sewaren, N.J.

The majority of the spilled fuel was collected in a containment boom shortly after the barge was punctured, however a sheen approximately four miles long was observed by a Coast Guard overflight this morning, read a recent Coast Guard news release.

That overflight mentioned in the news release -- you guessed it, done by a crew from the Coast Guard Auxiliary First Southern Region's AUXAIR detachment. On their routine mission, they were requested to overfly this particular environmental accident and survey for any possible damage. They unfortunately found the diesel fuel that wasn't contained.

Coast Guard Auxiliary aircraft provide an essential service to both the Coast Gurad and this country. These private planes are efficient, and cost-effective, costing the Coast Guard and the US Taxpayer less than 10% of the cost of a Coast Guard helicopter, hour for hour.

AUXAIR also has limitations. Most of AUXAIR consists of two – four seater single engine private planes. There are a limited number of multi-engine, jet and helicopters in the fleet. For the most part, the fixed wing aircraft are small, and limited in mission duration because of fuel capacity. Hence they are kept close to shore to do missions suited to the particular air-frame being used.

Feburary 14, 2005 – Brunswick, GA -- Four Coast Guard Auxiliary airmen this week played a key role in the search and rescue of a downed aircraft near Brunswick, Georgia.

The airmen were on their return flight from the Coast Guard Air Station at Hunter Air Field Sunday afternoon when they were alerted by Savannah Approach Control that a small aircraft was reported down about 20 miles from their location and along their route of flight.

The Coast Guard Auxiliary flight was requested to divert to the area and assist in finding the downed aircraft. From the information provided to them by the air traffic controllers, the Auxiliary aircraft located the general area of the incident and conducted a brief search and located the downed Piper Cub aircraft, about 20 miles south of Savannah, read the Coast Guard Auxiliary news release.

After this news release went out, I got a call from a brand new Coast Guard Auxiliary member, who happens to be a pilot. This gentleman has been flying for the better part of forty years, is qualified in multi-engine operation, instrument flight and as a pilot-instructor. What makes this unique, is this gentleman, unbeknownst to me, joined and never talked to me. Why me? Because my 70 year-old Uncle Joel didn't remember I too am a member of the United States Coast Guard Auxiliary.

For more information on the Aviation Program of the Coast Guard Auxiliary or on the Auxiliary and its other programs, why not contact your local Auxiliary Flotilla. They can be found by zip code by using our Flotilla Finder <http://www.cgaux.org/cgauxweb/getzip.html>.

For more information about the Coast Guard Aviation program, contact your local Coast Guard recruiter or find them on the web at www.uscg.mil or www.gocoastguard.com.