Swiftwater and Flood Rescue Technician *Instructor* Course

Assessment of the *Special Rescue Services Group* Instructor course
by Richard Hackwell

This is the first time that Jim Segerstrom's ground breaking course has been run in the UK . Our association with the original founder of Rescue3 international began with a meeting of minds on the high standards that should constitute a technician level course. Technical Rescue has long believed that specialist rescue should involve only the best prepared, most capable rescuers and a pass shouldn't simply be the result of having been on the course. So at the risk of appearing narcicistic we sent our best water rescuer on what is currently the most arduous test of water rescue capabilities. Richard Hackwell is a TRU Rescue Technican, Inshore Rescue Boat Helm, Lifeguard and Aux Coastguard. He passed the course with merit but admits that it felt like a close-run thing!

The course is aimed at water rescue practitioners who wish to train others in both Swiftwater and Flood Rescue to the three recognised international levels; Awareness, Operations and Technician. A SFRT candidate must ultimately complete the objectives listed below to be a technician. The outcomes below form the basis of the Instructor course, but are of course, covered in greater depth.

In addition to the in-depth subject matter the course covers appropriate teaching/ assessment techniques, student welfare and Health and safety considerations.

The course is aimed at making instructors out of practicing water rescuers with both previous training and experience. This course certainly doesn't fall into the Train the Trainer category so lamented in the modern world of Rescue. Before enrolment the candidate must be able to satisfy the following criteria.

1. **Proof of completion of a nationally recognised swift water rescue *Technician* level programme within the previous two years, or permission of instructor/ trainer due to relevant experience.**
2. **Proof of completion of a technician-level rope rescue class within the previous two years, or permission of instructor/ trainer.**
3. **Ability to swim 300m in 8.5 minutes or less.**

(ED: Interestingly, some swiftwater rescue instructor level qualifications require no more than the student's ability to swim 30m. An instructor, only capable of swimming the width of a single carriageway road, seems completely out of kilter with the potential immersion related risks they are responsible for controlling)

Qualification is not just based on passing the course, probationary instructors are required to both shadow a qualified Instructor and also teach under their supervision when delivering Technician courses. (Awareness and Operations can be taught on completion).
To keep the qualification instructors need to teach a minimum of two courses a year, all

Candidates are encouraged to use their own equipment where appropriate. Here a TRU mini pulley system (CPS) utilising water rescue rope is used as a tensioning aid while a simple munter hitch (foreground) belays the boat's mid-water positioning system (orange &white ropes)

Boat handling is arduous and frequently ended in a premature cold bath!

IRIA courses are open to the scrutiny of the organisation to maintain instructor standards, quality audits are undertaken frequently to avoid standard dilution. The course is run over 5 days including a 2 hour evening session. Sessions are split between theory and practical sessions in a moving water environment.

The course covers the following areas:

- Advanced hydrology and hydro-topography
- Training venue selection and risk assessment.
- Advanced swiftwater skills development workshops including use of rescue adjuncts from inflatable pathways to hose inflation units
- Incident Command System
- Flood Mitigation protocols
- Swiftwater and Flood Rescue Technician Quality Standards
- Assessing practical skills.
- Inshore Rescue Boat skills.
- Vertical access techniques above water
- Training programme administration and record keeping.
- Unstable surface response

- Use of motorised rescue assets including Personal Watercrafts and Helicopters
- Immersion Injuries and Complications
- Trainer Assessment

Course Review

The venue, Holme Pierrepont in Nottingham UK, was well suited to both the content and pace of this course.

Home to the UK National Watersports centre, the site boasts a fl mile white water course, with quoted classifications from 1 to 3+. The site provides physical examples of moving water hazards and this includes the full range from safe eddies to some swimmer friendly holes. The varying degrees of depth and difficulty provide a perfect training ground to cover all aspects of swiftwater and flood rescue techniques. While being challenging the site is easily managed for safety and the care of the students was always paramount from both the instructor and the staff of the centre.

Both accommodation and lecture facility were based on site, this made the gruelling schedule easier as there was no travelling time between the accommodation or training facilities.

The course content was delivered with a highly successful blend of theory, course notes, case studies, video footage, practical work and in field examples and observation. The venue meant that examples of hydrology were on site to back up the theory sessions and provide the opportunity to practice rescue techniques in a variety of conditions and scenarios. The course content alone was worthy of note, but the added value of this course was its delivery by an individual with over 30 years of field experience. There is no equal to a trainer who is able to draw on their own rescue experience.

Available for use on the course were a number of innovative pieces of equipment including Oceanid's Rapid Deployment Craft, Crossline Solutions Reach rescue system and US Diver Shredder Fins. This was consistant with the forward looking attitude of the course, with a strong message regarding the development of equipment and techniques and sharing of information.

There is no doubt about it this is a tough and demanding course both intellectually and physically. Self study and pre-course preparation is an essential element of the training and the comprehensive manual was supplied on enrolment. Lectures were in depth with high levels of student interaction and discussion.

Practical sessions involved a lot of swimming in fast flowing and challenging water with the added joy of negotiating various shoots and drops on a regular basis. (Especially when fellow students failed to 'rescue' you). Boat work was intense with the 'highlight' being an instructors special where we were tipped, crashed and capsized at every opportunity while running the course. Expect plenty of time in the green room. Practicals and scenarios were challenging and realistic

The only downside to the course was 50% of us showing symptoms of stomach bugs, there are blunter descriptions but they're probably inappropriate. To be fair this is probably attributable to the amount of Trent river we drank and some of us disregarding the gross deconatmination systems recommended by the instructors! This certainly highlighted the need for meticulus decontamination and keeping your mouth shut.

Assessment is continuous throughout the week with no big end day test as the be all and end all, this is no easy option, your performance needs to be consistently high in all the disciplines. Only 5 of the 7 original candidates passed the course and these were all high quality, water experienced candidates.

While this attrition rate may seem high to some, to me it signifies the importance of pre-qualification in the component disciplines and the value of rescue experience to those who wish to train others.

In conclusion a very valuable course, with a good venue, good course material, experienced instructors and a solid qualification which inspires confidence.

CONTACT: www.rigsysems.co.uk or www.sprcialrescue.com TR

Live-Bait training. Delivery of a throwline direct to the victim by hand.

It's no good trying to hide on this course!!

Main picture: The Carlsson Board in action - a most useful swiftwater negotiation aid.

Pictures by Will Beeley.

Contact www.rigsystems.co.uk for details of Jim Segerstroms next UK course.