

The Officers, Directors and Members of
US SAILING
are pleased to present the
ARTHUR B. HANSON RESCUE MEDAL
to
Walter Leger and Rhett Leger

for the rescue as follows:

On January 13, 2008, with the water and air temperature in the upper 50's and two-foot chop in the afternoon on Lake Pontchartrain in New Orleans, Louisiana, three young sailors headed out for a sail on a 19' Flying Scot when they spotted a fishing boat swamp and capsize not too far away with two men and a woman submerge into the cold water without lifejackets.

The victims clearly were in danger with their heads bobbing in and out of the water, calling for the Lord, and one calling that he had difficulty breathing. The sailors went there immediately, where skipper Clerc Cooper, age 14, removed her lifejacket and threw it to the woman, while Chris Algero, age 15, and Jon Nunn, age 14, tossed the bowline. She refused to get aboard, while insisting that they get her boyfriend. The Flying Scot stalled and was drifting away, so Cooper grabbed a lifejacket and jumped into the Lake , and swam with difficulty against the chop for the two men. As the Flying Scot drifted towards the seawall, the rescuers trimmed sails, which dragged the woman underwater and released the sails. The woman became cooperative and the rescuers hauled her on board and took her directly to the harbor.

Meanwhile, Cooper calmed one man down before giving him the lifejacket. Next, she noticed a floating seat, swam to it, and swam it over to the second man. Cooper pulled herself on top of the overturned hull, just as Walter and Rhett Leger in an 11-foot rigid inflatable arrived to assist. The Legers had been testing their new dinghy in the harbor, because they did not think it could handle the conditions on the Lake . The Leger's hauled the two men aboard, and found the victims with uncontrollable shaking, with one in and out of consciousness with his eyes rolling white. There was only enough space for the Leger's and the two victims and they headed for shore. Cooper was left on the upturned hull wearing a thin wetsuit. Algero, Nunn and two locals, Cal Herman, Jr. and John Gray, grabbed a powerboat and headed back out for Cooper, and all returned safely to shore. One victim was complaining of chest pains, and all three victims were taken to University Hospital by the paramedics who were called to the scene.

Congratulations to Walter Leger and Rhett Leger for risking themselves and their own vessel against the odds to rescue two hypothermic victims. US SAILING is pleased to present the Arthur B. Hanson Rescue Medal in recognition of this event.

Alan McMillan
Chairman, Safety at Sea Committee
By Direction

				
Left to Right: Captain Lincoln Stroh, Commander of the U.S. Coast Guard Sector New Orleans, Jonathan Nunn, Chris Algero, and Clerc Cooper.	Clerc Cooper, Chris Algero, and Jonathan Nunn.	Left to Right: Walter Leger, Captain Lincoln Stroh, Commander of the U.S. Coast Guard Sector New Orleans, and Rhett Leger.	Left to Right: Albert "Chip" Carpenter (original Hanson crewmember), Walter Leger, and Rhett Leger.	Foreground Left to Right: US SAILING House of Delegates Member Karen Reisch and Hanson Award Donor and former Hanson crew Albert "Chip" Carpenter.
On May 25, 2008 at the Southern Yacht Club Jubly Wynn One-Design Regatta awards ceremony, the United States Coast Guard presented Citations, and US SAILING presented the Arthur B. Hanson Rescue Medal to the rescuers.				

Background:

By Clerc Cooper (age 14)

Jon Nunn (14), Chris Algero (15), and I decided to go for a practice sail on Sunday, January 13. It was a cold day, about 50 degrees. We got out to the club around noon . Together, we decided to take out a Flying Scot. We went to the office, checked out the boat, and proceeded to rig it. After rigging the boat and getting all our gear on, we went out on the water. We had been told that the lake temperature was only 56 degrees, so we had on relatively heavy gear under our lifejackets. It was probably about 1:00 pm .

The breeze was out of the North, at about 14 knots causing the mouth of the harbor to be very choppy and confused. As soon as we were out the mouth of the harbor, we noticed a small motorboat, probably about 15 feet long that looked a little un-seaworthy. They were about 50 yards off of the steps of the Lake Ponchartrain shore. We started to sail over, just to check that the three people on board were ok. As we were sailing in that direction, they started to wave to us. Jon, Chris, and I realized that their engine had gone out. While looking at the stalled motor, the stranded boaters all moved to the stern, where a wave proceeded to swamp them. As we moved toward them, all three wound up in the lake and the boat was upside down. A closer look, revealed that they were two males and one woman, all around the age of 30. None of the people were wearing lifejackets, and none of them had the slightest idea about how to swim. All three were flailing about and yelling frantically. One man shouted that he was unable to breathe.

Upon arriving on the scene, I threw my lifejacket to the closest person, the lady. Someone tossed her a line to hang onto as well. We tried to sail closer to the other victims, but with the

combination of the wind, waves, and a panicking lady hanging onto the boat, it was not possible. The woman refused to get aboard the Scot, complaining that she did not want to be separated from her boyfriend. Our boat began to be pushed away from the scene, farther from the drowning people. Realizing the risk to the other two men, I jumped in the water equipped with an orange, toilet seat lifejacket. I was surprised by how difficult it was to make progress in the two foot chop. This was a lot different than our summer swimming ventures. By this time, a crowd had gathered on the shore and included several National Guardsmen and a number of policemen. The two men in the water hollered and one repeatedly called out to the Lord to save him.

I brought the orange life jacket to the next closest person, a large man, but was concerned about being drowned by him in his panicking state. His eyes were very bloodshot and appeared to be rolling back in his head. Recognizing that once he had the lifejacket I would be without one, I cautioned him to relax, take the jacket and avoid grabbing onto me. He agreed and I gave him the orange PFD. Then I noticed that there was another object floating in the water. The seat off of the front of the boat bobbed on top of the water, so I swam over and brought it to the last victim. Even though all three people now had some form of help, the situation was still not a good one. I took a perch on top of the overturned boat and offered reassurance to the men who continued to scream.

While I was in the water bringing flotation to the men, Chris and Jon were having a difficult time dealing with the woman, who still resisted getting aboard. As the Scot was now dangerously close to the steps at the edge of the lake, they trimmed sail and headed away from the steps. As they did, the woman was pulled under the boat. They quickly stopped sailing and were relieved when the woman agreed to get in the boat with them. Eventually, they managed to lift her onto the Flying Scot and bring her safely to the Junior Dock at Southern.

In the midst of all this, Jon and Chris saw a small inflatable dinghy coming out of the harbor and flagged it down, enlisting assistance to fish the two men out of the water. The driver of the dinghy turned out to be Walter Leger and his son in their new, eleven-foot inflatable. They were a great help in the rescue, and called the Coast Guard. The small dinghy was able to pick up the two drowning men in the water, but did not have room for me. The two men had been floating and drowning in the water for about 3 minutes at that point. The boaters had probably been wet and cold for a much longer time, however, because they had been in a small boat on a choppy day. The men were very tired, hypothermic, and their heads were going under water with each passing wave. Back at the Yacht Club, Chris and Jon took the lady, whose name turned out to be Samantha, to the warmest place in the club, the kitchen. She was wrapped in tablecloths and taken care of there until the EMS arrived on the scene.

Meanwhile, the two men who had been in the water were taken to the dock by Landry's. Chris and Jon were at the club, and realized that I was still out on the water. They, along with Cal Herman, Jr. and John Gray, came out on a scat boat and picked me up off of the capsized boat, where I had been floating.

All three people from the capsized boat were hypothermic, and one of the men was complaining of chest pains. They were all transported to University Hospital . Other than Samantha, we never learned their names.