



# THE EDGE

## CANYON FISHING REPORT

THE SOURCE FOR CURRENT BIG GAME  
FISHING INFORMATION

### "JACK TAR" LANDS 323 LB. SWORDFISH

CAPT. JOHN WEINHOFFER JR TAKES  
TROPHY FISH AT TIP OF HUDSON

*THIS ISSUE  
SPONSORED BY:*

**SWITLIK  
PARACHUTE CO.**

**A FAMILY TRADITION OF EXCELLENCE**

# MEET THE PRO'S



by  
Captain Richard Switlik

## INSTALLING LIFE RAFTS

One of the most frequently asked questions about life rafts is this: How and where should they be installed? Life rafts are available in soft valises and hard containers; we'll look at those in soft valises first.

A life raft in a fabric valise should be stowed in a dry and protected location. A protected location is one in which tool boxes and fishing gear will not be tossed on top of the raft and it won't be used as a seat. Life rafts are tough, but use common sense when handling them.

A raft in a valise must be stowed in an accessible location. For a center console boat, which is almost always limited to a soft valise, this means a cockpit locker or the cuddy. Be careful though; a raft, with the help of gravity, may drop easily into a tight fitting locker, but in a panic situation may prove very difficult to remove. The effects of vibration and settling may cause the valise's dimensions to change to the extent that the raft is virtually impossible to remove from a tight fitting locker.

When underway on a larger sport fishing boat, never stow the life raft valise below. Fire, rapid flooding or capsizing may make the raft impossible to reach.

Determining the best location for a raft in a hard container aboard larger sport fishing boats is more difficult. In fact, there is no perfect location; they all have advantages and disadvantages. The four choices are as follows: 1. below 2. the bridge deck 3. the bow 4. the cockpit

Once again, **never stow your life raft below!** A friend of mine stowed his in the engine room. (His wife didn't think it would look good on the bow.) Off the coast of Florida, one of his engine's diesel high pressure lines fractured, spraying a diesel mist over the turbo charger. Under these circumstances, diesel fuel burns quite nicely - explosively in fact. Unfortunately, the automatic fire suppression system failed to operate and it took my friend three minutes to locate and use the manual backup. The boat suffered extensive damage, and the raft was destroyed.

The bridge deck offers better accessibility but may

make it physically more difficult to release and launch the raft. In the event of fire, which can get out of control surprisingly quickly, the bridge area soon becomes engulfed in flames and dense smoke. Launching from the bridge creates a greater potential for snagging and fouling the raft's painter. It's also difficult to release and transfer control of the painter to someone in the cockpit, which may already be getting hot.

The bow, once taboo because of esthetics, is now perhaps the most popular place for mounting a life raft. This location has two advantages: In the event of fire, it's the last part of the boat to burn. In the event of sinking, the bow is usually the last part of the boat to go under water. Unfortunately, locating your raft on the bow has a very serious disadvantage; it's the hardest part of the boat to get to. If you've chosen the bow, don't mount your raft too far forward. Try to picture your boat sinking rapidly by the stern and you having to crawl up a 30-degree, smooth and slippery surface to reach, release and launch your raft. Once you've launched and inflated your life raft, you've got to get it back to the cockpit area for your crew to board (unwise or impossible in the event of fire), or you've got to get your crew up to the bow - difficult under the best of circumstances.

Once there, you'll discover that because of the bow's high freeboard, you're now several feet above the raft, and it's become very difficult to get directly into the raft. If circumstances allow, make every effort to get your crew and yourself directly into the raft. If forced into the water, rough or choppy conditions can make it very difficult or impossible for you to swim even 50 feet.

The last and perhaps best location to mount your life raft may prove to be impossible on most sport fishing boats: the cockpit area. Unfortunately, limited cockpit deck size, deck hatches, interference with fishing activities, or lack of raised shelf areas may preclude the cockpit area.

There is, however, one possibility which may allow you to mount your raft in the cockpit. Some rafts and their cradles may be attached to a vertical bulkhead or surface. Before you mount your raft in this manner, check with the raft's manufacturer for their recommendation.

With the raft in the cockpit, most of your crew is either near the raft or just seconds away, even in the event of fire. Because of the low freeboard, the raft is easily boarded, and you should be able to get away from your boat before it's engulfed in flames.

As you can see, selecting a location on your boat to install a life raft isn't easy or something to do casually. It could be a matter of you and your crew surviving a sinking. ■

"As reprinted from"  
**THE EDGE**  
Canyon Fishing Report