



Feature Release

From the U.S. Coast Guard Acquisition Directorate

What's in a Scene?

The Response Boat-Medium and 'The Adjustment Bureau'

By Michael Valliant

Capt. Joel Dolbeck 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



Actor Matt Damon and Capt. Greg Hitchen, deputy sector commander of Coast Guard Sector New York, cruise New York Harbor aboard a 45-foot Response Boat-Medium during the filming of the movie, "The Adjustment Bureau." Photo by Andy Schwartz/Universal Pictures.

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

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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, 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—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



George Nolfi, writer and director of “The Adjustment Bureau,” and actor Matt Damon talk aboard an RB-M while filming a scene in New York Harbor. Photo by Andy Schwartz/Universal Pictures.

“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.

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“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.

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 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.

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.

“With entertainment, we’re going to the American public on their terms,” Carroll said. “We can show them something of what the Coast Guard does on a daily basis and package it in a way that is engaging.” ■