

Review & Forecast

A Watershed in Coast Guard History

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By any measure, 2003 was a watershed in the 213-year history of the U.S. Coast Guard. Beginning with the introduction of a new "Maritime Strategy for Homeland Security" early in the new year, and continuing with its realignment under the Department of Homeland Security in March as part of the largest reorganization of the federal government in the post-World War II era, the scope and scale of the Coast Guard's maritime, multimission and military operations during the past year were nothing short of extraordinary.

Coast Guard men and women rose to the challenge, bolstered by the largest mobilization of reservists in our history. Collectively, they fought the global war on terrorism on the home front as well as overseas. Heightened Coast Guard presence and vigilance in U.S. ports, waterways and coastal areas significantly increased the safety of American citizens, protected critical infrastructure and assured the free flow of sea-borne commerce. Coast Guard forces were also engaged valiantly halfway around the world supporting combatant commanders during Operation Iraqi Freedom.

Each of these accomplishments is significant individually. When considered in combination with its performance in other traditional mission areas, the collective magnitude of the Coast Guard's sustained operational excellence during 2003 is truly noteworthy.

Working closely with its interagency and international law-enforcement partners, for example, the Coast Guard seized its second-highest annual total of illegal drugs in FY 2003—more than 14,000 pounds of marijuana and 136,865 pounds of cocaine. Coast Guard units stopped more than 6,000 undocumented migrants from entering

the United States illegally. This law-enforcement presence to preserve maritime security in the 3.4-million-square-mile U.S. Exclusive Economic Zone also led to the documentation of more than 100 significant violations of fisheries regulations (with more than 40 illegal catches seized) and more than 140 violations of laws protecting marine mammals and endangered species.

Strong winds and bitterly cold temperatures on the Great Lakes created the worst ice season the region has experienced in more than 20 years; yet Coast Guard icebreaking cutters kept merchant vessels and barges moving on the nation's inland waterways. A hemisphere away, in Antarctica, the icebreakers USCGC *Polar Sea* and USCGC *Healy* completed the most difficult Operation Deep Freeze resupply of the McMurdo Station to date. They smashed through 50 miles of ice more than a story high to enable U.S. scientists to continue their studies of the Earth's climate. In home waters, Coast Guard units responded to more than 41,500 search-and-rescue cases—saving more than 6,000 lives and assisting in safeguarding property valued at more than \$110 million.

Clearly, the events of September 11, 2001, generated a seismic shift in the security threats facing the United States. Our intelligence assessment is that these evolving threats—each having a distinct maritime dimension—will grow in number and complexity. With one foot planted squarely in the present, meeting today's operational requirements and threats to maritime security, the Coast Guard must also take steps to posture itself for tomorrow to sustain the highest levels of operational excellence in the changing world that lies before us.

Fortunately, we are well-positioned to meet these dual imperatives. The

past year's realignment in the Department of Homeland Security was accomplished smoothly and efficiently, thanks in large measure to the leadership of Secretary Tom Ridge and the hard work and professionalism of the 22 agencies involved, including Coast Guard men and women. Unity of command, mission focus and collaborative joint competencies all have been strengthened in a common effort to improve the safety of U.S. citizens and the security of our homeland.

The Coast Guard is executing its layered, defense-in-depth maritime strategy for homeland security aggressively to reduce risks in the maritime domain. Last year's contract for 700 new maritime security boats will allow us to improve our presence and responsiveness on the waterfront. Twelve new 100-person maritime safety and security teams will provide force protection and port security around the nation. More sea marshals have been deployed to board high-interest ships. We have expanded cooperative efforts with the Navy at the National Maritime Intelligence Center, created new maritime intelligence fusion centers and will open joint harbor operations centers (manned by the Coast Guard, Navy and harbor police) in Norfolk, Virginia, and San Diego, California, early this year.

A focus on the four main pillars of improved capabilities for awareness, prevention, protection and response will serve to prevent future terrorist attacks through preemption or deterrence, reducing maritime security risks to our homeland. With the strong backing of the American people, the Department of Homeland Security and Congress, recent budget increases have allowed the Coast Guard to improve current readiness, increase our presence in U.S. waters, balance our full range of missions near their pre-September 11 levels, grow our ranks of active members and reservists, and invest in the modern platforms and systems so critical to future success.

Key to our current and future readiness is obtaining the right capabilities and the right capacity as we grow, modernize and realign our force. The Rescue 21 and Integrated Deepwater System recapitalization programs place us on the right course to do so. In particular, Deepwater's more capable platforms and systems will be important enablers in our quest to improve

maritime domain awareness and sustain operational excellence in all of our multiple missions.

All indicators suggest that the nation's reliance on the Coast Guard as its maritime guardian and shield of freedom will continue to expand during the years ahead. In the end, all

success will hinge on the dedication and professionalism of the Coast Guard men and women. The dynamic events of 2003 are but a prelude to an equally challenging future. Guided by our core values of honor, respect and devotion to duty and a steady focus on the fundamental building blocks of

people, readiness and stewardship, the Coast Guard is equal to the task. /st/

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