



All Hands Messages

Coast Guard Day 2009

To the Men and Women of the United States Coast Guard:

This message to you is longer than normal, but I urge you to take some time to read this and reflect on our past and future.

Coast Guard Day provides a wonderful opportunity to reflect on the parallels between historical events and our current activities. The concept of a “Coast Guard” is a unique product of the American Revolution - a blend of previous naval and customs functions that had never been assigned to a single entity. Two-hundred and nineteen years ago, Alexander Hamilton created a modest service to collect revenue to sustain our fledging Nation. Envisioning the need for a more robust federal maritime presence, he directed the first Revenue Cutter captains to ensure the safety of life at sea, preserve our maritime sovereignty, and facilitate maritime commerce while treating their countrymen with respect. He also foresaw the need for risk management and flexibility to meet emerging demands.

A brilliant visionary, Hamilton knew change was coming. Today, the nations of this world are coming to understand the relevance, value, and indispensability of a maritime presence capable of exerting and insuring national sovereignty. While larger nations have a requirement to project naval sea power, most nations are (or should be) concerned with the depletion of living marine resources, the safe and secure development of offshore oil and gas industries, illegal migration, drug and other contraband trafficking, and the use of the global commons for piracy or to further extremist ideologies through sea-based terrorist and criminal activities. We exist today because this was understood for the first time two centuries ago by the First Guardian.

Our path to the present has at times been difficult. Throughout our history, the Coast Guard has undergone significant organizational changes driven by vital national interests that have altered and expanded our missions. Each change brought anxiety, uncertainty, and a level of apprehension. Change is never easy. As we navigate through our current challenges, we should remember that even before they were officially promulgated, our enduring values – honor, respect, and devotion to duty - held the Service together through previous modernization and recapitalization efforts, as well as shifts in our safety, security and stewardship missions. We are wise to learn from our proud history as we build a powerful future.

Modernization isn't a new idea. When Ellsworth Bertholf became Captain-Commandant of the Revenue Cutter Service in 1911, he faced a Presidential commission which recommended splintering the Service because it was too multi-functional. Bertholf successfully countered that a multi-mission agency would achieve greater efficiencies and then went a step further to embrace the Secretary of Treasury's recommendation to merge with the Life-Saving Service. Combining the military cuttermen with the civilian lifesavers was a daunting task rife with skepticism. Two

vastly different cultures had to unite for a common purpose. Our predecessors made it work, and in 1915 the modern Coast Guard was born.

Our current challenge to recapitalize is not new either. Captain Alexander Fraser, the first military Commandant of the Revenue Marine in the 1840s, pushed the fleet to transition from wood hulled sailing vessels to iron steamers. Fraser's initiative put the Revenue Marine at the forefront of federal efforts to develop steam propulsion and eventually led to a recapitalized and more-efficient Service. Likewise, our first surfmen used oars to muscle their way through storms right up to the 20th century. It wasn't until 1899 when Revenue Marine Lieutenant C. H. McClellan designed the first motor lifeboat. A true skunk-works project - it was a 2-cylinder, 12 horsepower engine with twin reversible propellers – but it worked, and the lessons learned contributed to the development of the famous 36-foot motor lifeboat. Acquisition, construction, and integration of capital assets are difficult tasks, but with each innovation we increase our ability to protect, defend, and save.

Protecting the maritime public is at the heart of our safety mission. After multiple steamship disasters, the federal government created the U.S. Steamboat Inspection Service in 1838, formally acknowledging the need for a federal marine safety role. Highlighting just how complex and vital this mission area was to our economy and war-efforts, President Roosevelt signed Executive Order 9083 in 1942. For the first time in history, all of the federal government's marine safety functions were consolidated under one, multi-mission organization; the U.S. Coast Guard. Conceived in peace but consecrated during war, our marine safety mission reflected the Nation's constant need to protect lives and property.

The Coast Guard traces its national security and defense roots back to 1790. During the Quasi-War with France, the Revenue Marine cutters were the only war ships able to defend our maritime sovereignty prior to the reestablishment of the Navy. This role reemerged in World War I following the horrific explosion at Black Tom Island, a munitions depot in New York Harbor. German saboteurs were suspected because Black Tom Island was a vital transfer station for Allied weapons destined for the battlefields of France. Through the Espionage Act of 1917, Congress empowered the Coast Guard to prevent sabotage on merchant shipping and cargo, eventually leading to the creation of our Captain of the Port Authority. Each forged during conflict, our safety and security missions have remained intertwined – stronger and more effective in concert than they are alone.

As Guardians, we are stewards of the marine environment. After Alaska was acquired in 1867, the Revenue Cutter LINCOLN was dispatched to police this new frontier. Private enterprises quickly discovered Alaska's treasure trove of natural resources and it was only the Revenue Marine that protected the vast salmon stocks, seal population, and indigenous people from exploitation. Following the tragic EXXON VALDEZ oil spill in 1990, Congress passed the Oil Protection Act (OPA 90) issuing one of the biggest legislative mandates in Coast Guard history. While broad in scope and impact, OPA 90 reaffirmed and strengthened the Coast Guard's existing stewardship mission that had been in place since the LINCOLN plied Prince William Sound.

As you can see, our current challenges have strong historical roots. On this Coast Guard Day, we stand at another inflection point in our proud Service history. Our predecessors made course corrections amidst tumultuous circumstances but they never lost touch with Alexander

Hamilton's charge and their values. Each time, we maintained a true heading and emerged stronger and better positioned to meet new demands. As Hamilton envisioned, a Guardian Ethos remains fixed in our organizational DNA, providing the strength, support and structure to guide our efforts. Our proud history stabilizes the Service so we can build a powerful future as America's Maritime Guardian.

Thank you for your tremendous dedication to the Coast Guard and the Nation. We are writing our history each day and each of you has a hand on the pen.

Admiral T. W. Allen
Commandant, U.S. Coast Guard

