

Kramek

ADM Robert E.

Saying goodbye to the service's 20th commandant



Every commandant leaves a personal stamp on the Coast Guard.

What we remember of a commandant's four-year tenure is first recorded in oral history as stories told on the messdeck or the midwatch. Later those anecdotes grow into legends that create the unofficial history of the "old Guard," that time period that began "when ships were wood and sailors were iron," and ended just before the newest boot reported aboard.

ADM John B. Hayes will be remembered as the commandant who grounded aircraft and docked cutters until the service's operational funds were restored. Two commandants literally changed the way the service looks: ADM Chester Bender replaced the Navy-style "crackerjack" uniform with the more-modern "Bender blues," and ADM Paul Yost made the service clean-shaven.

The Yost years will also be remembered for his strong emphasis on our military character; ADM J. William Kirne focused attention on our stewardship of the marine environment, with attention to "People — Balance and Excellence."

We have been "The Lifesavers," "Smokies of the Sea," "An Armed Service and More," "Team Coast Guard," and "The World's Premiere Maritime Service."

How will we remember the Kramek years?

Were we always this busy?

Almost immediately after ADM Robert E. Kramek pinned on his fourth star, the Coast Guard's operational tempo hit high gear, earning the Coast Guard a Department of Transportation Gold Medal for Outstanding Achievement.

No new missions were added during the Kramek years, but the old ones took us to new places.

In consecutive years, severe flooding hit the Pacific Northwest, the Gulf Coast, the Ohio River Valley and the northern Great Plains states. Tropical storms and hurricanes — named Gordon, Erin, Marilyn, Bertha, Opal and Fran — pounded Southeastern states; one even pitched a Coast Guard cutter high and dry. After each natural disaster, the Coast Guard arrived to save lives and help the survivors begin the long process of rebuilding their lives.

And we continued our battle against another natural enemy: ice. The Great Lakes saw some of the worst ice in history during 1995 and 1996; but Coast Guard icebreakers kept commercial traffic moving. Farther north, the CGC Polar Sea became the first U.S. surface vessel to reach the North Pole.

Migrant interdiction in the Caribbean set record levels over the past four years during Operations Able Manner, Able Vigil and Support Democracy. At the same time, a new threat emerged in the Pacific, and units there began stopping decrepit ships attempting to smuggle Asian migrants into the United States.

Last year the Coast Guard led an international effort to target various chokepoints in the illegal drug trade. Operations Frontier Shield, Gulf Shield and Frontier Lance set a record for cocaine seizures.

During the past four years, Coast Guardsmen have headed overseas in support of U.S. foreign policy. Cutters were deployed to the Mediterranean Sea, Black Sea, Baltic Sea, Red Sea and the Persian Gulf. Port security units, law enforcement detachments and mobile training teams worked with host nations on four continents.

And, of course, there were those cases we can never forget: TWA Flight 800, Alas Airlines Flight 301, and the tug Scandia off Rhode Island.

A flurry of shipbuilding

Since 1994, the federal government has been under intense pressure to reduce the size of the budget deficit.

Like every federal agency, the Coast Guard complied with the mandate to cut, but the service also sought ways to use

new technologies to improve productivity and enhance mission performance, one of the goals outlined by Kramek in his Commandant's Direction. The result: In the Kramek years, the service launched four new classes of cutters: the Keeper- and Juniper-class buoytenders, the 87-foot patrol boats and a Polar icebreaker. And Kramek initiated the Deepwater Project, a study to determine the system to support the missions performed by our aging fleet of high-endurance cutters.

An accomplished admiral

Everyone knows about the major operations and the new vessels, but Kramek was also responsible for many achievements behind the scenes. In the past four years, he:

- Negotiated a memorandum of understanding with the Russian Federal Border Service that led to joint U.S.-Russian operations in the Bering Sea.
- Received a Meritorious Public Service Award from the NAACP.
- Created a fully-integrated leadership development program that led to the Leadership Development Center of Excellence.
- Set a government-wide example in National Performance Review improvements.
- Expanded the use of the Coast Guard in support of national security strategies and interests of the United States.
- Signed a memorandum of agreement with the Secretary of Defense and the Secretary of Transportation defining the Coast Guard's unique defense role in the post-Cold War era.
- Oversaw the integration of Reserve forces with the active-duty Coast Guard.
- Advanced the Coast Guard's reputation as the world's premier maritime service.

How will ADM Kramek's tenure as commandant be best remembered? Hard to say. There's a lot to choose from.

PAC Kenneth Arbogast, managing editor;
Photo by PA3 Scott Carr, 7th Dist.

June 1, 1994
ADM Robert E. Kramek relieves ADM J. William Kirne as Commandant.

As part of the effort to reinvent government and reduce the federal deficit, the Coast Guard undertakes Streamlining.

Cutters and port security units deploy to Haiti to assist in Operation Uphold Democracy.

The Coast Guard receives the Department of Transportation Gold Medal for operations in 1994.

New advances in Marine Safety are implemented — Prevention Through People, Standards of Training, Certification and Watchkeeping, and International Safety Management.

Operation Frontier Shield, the largest counternarcotics operation in Coast Guard history, begins in the Caribbean.

Admiral Kramek receives the Meritorious Service Award from the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People.

Coast Guard units set a record in 1997 for the highest number of cocaine seizures in the service's history.

1994

Operation Able Manner rescues thousands of Haitian migrants at sea.

Operation Able Vigil: More than 37,000 Cuban migrants are rescued by the Coast Guard; 34 cutters and 30 aircraft were involved.

The launchings of the CGC Juniper and Ida Lewis introduce two new classes of buoytenders.

Work begins on the Coast Guard's new 87-foot coastal patrol boats.

The CGC Gallatin is the first cutter to join the CINCEUR and NATO Baltic Operations.

Active, Reserve and Auxiliary units respond to massive flooding on Western Rivers.

The CGC Healy, the service's newest and largest icebreaker, is launched.

The Leadership Development Center of Excellence opens.

1998