

Words of Appreciation

Story and photo by PA3 Andrea Stevenson, D1

I saw how the Coast Guard has responded after 9/11, and I know how important the Coast Guard is for the safety and security and the well-being of our American citizens.

"This is a fine group of people, who don't get nearly as much appreciation from the American people as they should. And I'm here today to say thanks, on behalf of all the citizens who appreciate the long hours you put in, the daring rescues you accomplish and the fine service you provide to our country. Oh, yes, we're on guard in America."

With those words, President George W. Bush personally thanked the Coast Guard for performing its mission so capably.

The speech was part of the president's visit to Portland, Maine, where he visited Coast Guard units and discussed homeland security Jan. 25.

Capt. Cynthia Coogan, commanding officer of Group Portland, received word of the president's visit Jan. 16, and her unit immediately prepared for the event, which they would host. About 550 Coast Guard members participated in the visit.

Members from Group Portland, Marine Safety Office Portland, the CGC Willow a 225-foot buoy tender homeported in Newport, R.I. and the CGC Tahoma, a 270-foot medium-endurance cutter homeported in New Bedford, Mass., all took part in the preparations, according to Coogan.

The Coast Guard worked with various other agencies such as the City of Portland and South Portland, the FBI and the Secret Service in preparing for the president's visit.

"Each agency worked very well with each other during the visit. The cooperation between all the Coast Guard units and external departments was outstanding," said Lt. Paul Rooney, command intelligence officer at Group Portland, who assisted in the inter-agency coordination.

The CGC Tahoma buzzed with Secret Service agents and the president's press advance team while they planned the route the president would take while touring the cutter.

"The president asked how the Coast Guard crews were doing," said Coogan.

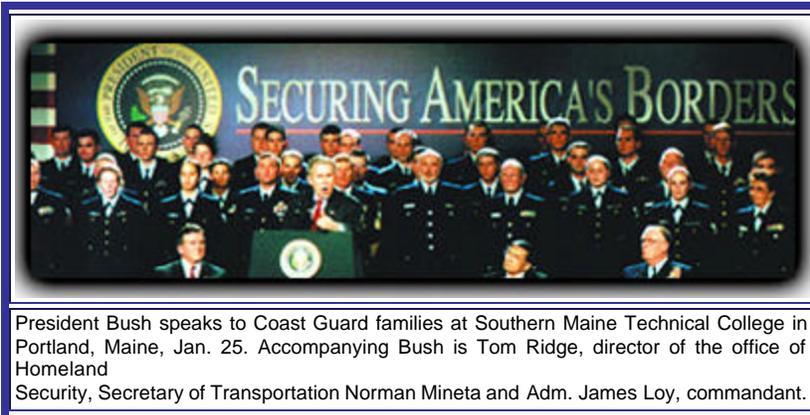
"I said that the crews were working long hours and his visit was a great morale booster. Also, I thanked him for his support," said Coogan.

During Bush's speech at Southern Maine Technical College, it was evident that his visit boosted the morale of the Coast Guard members present.

The majority Coast Guard crowd cheered and applauded throughout most of the president's speech. Some of the loudest cheers occurred when the president addressed the recent budget proposal.

"When it comes to securing our homeland, and helping people along the coast, the Coast Guard has got a vital and significant mission. And, therefore, the budget that I send to the United States Congress will have the largest increase in spending for the Coast Guard in our nation's history," said Bush.

"The visit was a great day for the Coast Guard active duty, Reserve and Auxiliarist men and women serving in Maine and throughout the United States," said Coogan.



President Bush speaks to Coast Guard families at Southern Maine Technical College in Portland, Maine, Jan. 25. Accompanying Bush is Tom Ridge, director of the office of Homeland Security, Secretary of Transportation Norman Mineta and Adm. James Loy, commandant.

