

# A Habit of Change

## Coast Guard Modernization

By Eric Tegler



The Coast Guard's 23rd Commandant, Adm. Thad W. Allen, is leading the service through its most dramatic restructuring since World War II. The details are both structural and cultural but they add up to one thing, Allen says - an organization in which change itself is a competency.

The Coast Guard's Guardian Ethos pledges its personnel to "defend and save" their fellow citizens, a calling more complex today than ever. Since September 11, 2001, the Coast Guard has seen an increase in responsibilities. In addition to its traditional search and rescue, marine safety, law enforcement, and ice breaking missions, greater emphasis has been placed on marine pollution control and enforcement, policing immigration and smuggling at sea, drug interdiction, maritime and port security, and broader cooperation with Customs and Border Protection and other federal agencies.

"Modernization, as I tell everybody, is just the current work list that we have in order to improve the Coast Guard but my ultimate goal is not Modernization," Allen asserted. "My ultimate goal is to create a change-centric organization that can sense, adapt to, and execute change when it's needed rather than having to go in after a period of years and do major surgery

Adm. Thad Allen, commandant of the Coast Guard, talks with Coast Guard personnel stationed at Coast Guard Base Kodiak, Alaska, Feb. 20, 2009.

like we're having to do now. We will adapt continually and follow through when we need to. That's been a problem in the past as I pointed out myself in a 'cause for action' for Modernization. What I'm really trying to do is to change the character and culture of the service so it's more in tune with changing when we need to change and not being afraid to believe ourselves."

Fostering this "change" mentality is a service-wide restructuring aimed at improving mission support and allowing for more flexible mission execution. Modernization has been referred to in simple terms as a headquarters' reorganization, financial restructuring, and the creation of a defined quick response group.

The last is already a reality. The Coast Guard's Deployable Operations Group (DOG) was stood up in 2007. The DOG is not unlike a U.S. Army or Marine Corps quick reaction force. It draws specially trained units from a prearranged force package to rapidly respond to a contingency. Following a Tsunami hitting American Samoa in late September 2009, the DOG's Pacific Strike Team deployed two members to American Samoa in support of Federal On-Scene Coordinators from Coast Guard Sector Honolulu and the Environmental Protection Agency Region 9. The PST members are currently completing shoreline cleanup assessments, inspecting vessels and regulated facilities.

The headquarters/command reorganization is well under way but will need congressional authorization to be completed. Its most important elements include the unification of the Coast Guard's Atlantic and Pacific Area Commands into a single geographically undivided operational command. This operational command is complemented by a new similarly unified "readiness" command focused on preparing and equipping forces. Each of these commands will receive guidance from newly created operational and mission support policy/planning entities.

A quick study of the Coast Guard's realignment chart illustrates the new structure. Beneath (and reporting to) the commandant and vice commandant are four new organizations that serve mission execution, mission support, force readiness, and operations policy/planning. From left to right, the Deputy Commandant for Operations (CG-DCO) fashions policy and plans facilitating the Coast Guard's various operational capabilities and its marine safety and security roles. The Deputy Commandant for Mission Support (CG-DCMS) oversees

logistics support for all Coast Guard assets with a Life Cycle Management Program and also establishes a responsive Human Resources system.

The Force Readiness Command (CG-FORCECOM) delivers readiness, ensuring that operational units receive the training and preparation they require. The Deployable Operations Group resides within FORCECOM as do major cutters and insures all its constituent units are ready to deploy. Operations Command (CG-OPCOM) oversees mission execution, directing/controlling the operational units that comprise Districts and Sectors across the Coast Guard.

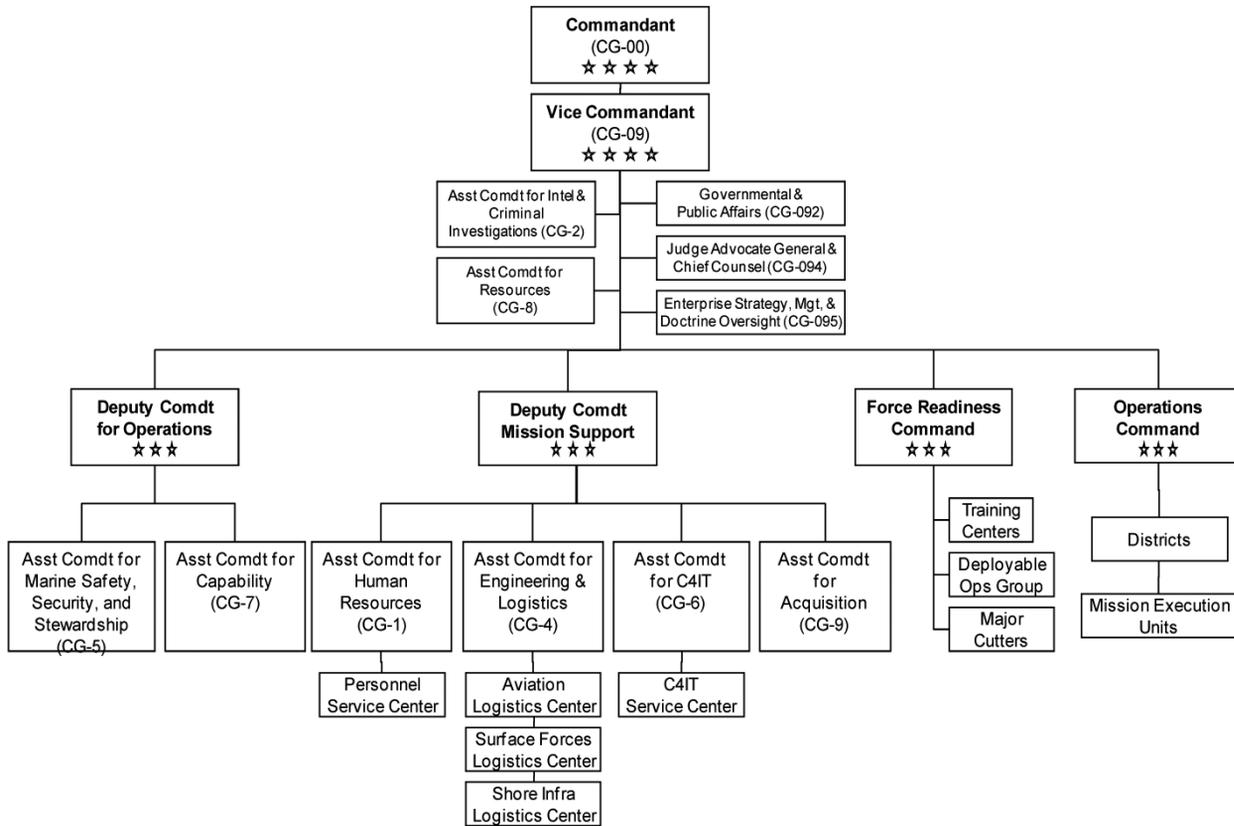
The command changes provide accountability in execution, support, readiness and policy. They signal what will not only be a more agile Coast Guard but a more resource efficient one. Although Modernization will alter the Coast Guard's organizational structure, it will remain as responsive as always to the American public and to maritime industry stakeholders.

To better understand how these and the resulting cultural changes within the Coast Guard will yield an organization that effectively and selflessly serves the American people in the 21st century, we spoke with Adm. Allen in late September 2009.

**Coast Guard Outlook 2010:** I noted that in a Coast Guard video explaining Modernization that Vice Adm. Jody Breckenridge, Pacific Area commander, Defense Forces West, said the most important piece of Modernization is looking at Coast Guard business practices and trying to standardize them all. Is that the root of the changes that have been proposed and acted upon?

**U.S. Coast Guard Commandant Adm. Thad W. Allen:** There are a lot of changes going on right now but the most fundamental with regard to Modernization is the mission support piece. In the past, we've had Balkanized support systems and what we're attempting to do at this point is to take the entire Coast Guard to what we call a product-line business model where there's a single point of accountability for every type of aircraft, cutter, smallboat, or sensor component. If there's a question about performance Coast Guard-wide - reliability, standards, maintenance procedures - it's handled in one place rather than locally at an intermediate level, a depot level, then through two different maintenance and logistics commands on two different coasts.

# Envisioned Coast Guard Organization After Modernization



Would you agree that “Modernization” is not unlike the U.S. Army’s materiel enterprise initiative or various U.S. Navy enterprise initiatives?

Those are pretty good comparisons. They are similar in that we’re trying to take an enterprise approach to mission support in the Coast Guard. They’re different in that, because of our size, we’ve been able to do something more comprehensive and that will set a standard organizational structure across the service. My goal is to apply the same business practices to our aviation, ship/smallboat, and sensors, and also use the same information systems across the Coast Guard whereas the other services may be using the same business practices but still have their traditional service communities. The real thrust is to unify the business processes inside the Coast Guard.

There’s a lot of acronymology associated with Modernization. Is it fair to sum it up in simple tripartite terms – a headquarters’

reorganization, financial restructuring, and a defined quick response group?

You can look at it very simply or as very complex. The approach to the entire Modernization of the Coast Guard is a focus on two things – mission execution and mission support. If you’re in the Coast Guard you do one or the other. I tell everyone in our town hall meetings that if you come to work in the morning and we can’t tell you what you’re doing in regard to mission execution or mission support, we’ve made one of two mistakes. We either haven’t explained your job to you or we don’t need your job.

What I’m trying to do is to get everybody to focus on the outputs that the organization is trying to create. We’re basically doing that through four entities. In the field we have a single operations synchronizer for all global operations with the Operations Command. We have the Force Readiness Command that prepares and equips those forces to be provided. At headquarters we have the Deputy Commandant for Operations who

channels all the policy and interaction with the government that relates to our execution. We have a Deputy Commandant for Mission Support who is a single point of accountability for acquisition and life cycle management for all of our assets. We do that through product line management in logistics centers. Those are the four pieces.

**Do you think that Coast Guard personnel understand the differences between the proposed Commandants for Operations and Mission Support and the Operations and Force Readiness Commanders? Is there overlap?**

The operational commander replaces the Pacific and Atlantic commands as a single global synchronizer of operations. The reason we did that is that the threats we face now are agnostic to our organizational boundaries. We interdict drugs on both sides of Panama but right now there are two different area commands and two different Districts rather than a focus on the threat vector with drugs moving north from South America. To be able to do that through a single operations coordinator is going to improve our effectiveness and efficiency. That said we have to interact with the Department of Defense, Homeland Security, and a lot of other departments here in [Washington, D.C.] regarding policies and how we deal with national strategies like the National Drug Control Strategy and the National Strategy for Maritime Security. These are issues that have to be translated into policy guidance for the Coast Guard. That's what the Deputy Commandant for Operations does.

**Would it be fair then to label the DCMS and the DCMS as "policy" and the OPCOM and Commander FORCECOM as "execution?"**

Yes, that would be pretty close. Let me put it another way. The Deputy Commandant for Mission Support supports all the mission activities of the Coast Guard through product lines. We have 11 missions in the Coast Guard - rescue, aids to navigation, drug enforcement and so forth. So you think of the Deputy Commandant for Mission Support as a product line manager in terms of services provided to enable mission execution. The Deputy Commandant for Operations actually manages our 11 statutory missions.

**Are there any concerns that centralizing operational command under one individual will diminish flexibility?**

The Atlantic and Pacific arms of the U.S. Navy are in some respects two different navies. While that presents some disadvantages, it also confers some advantages.

In effect, I'm doing away with the distinction of a 2nd and a 3rd Fleet and

having [instead] a fleet for America. We had an operation a while back where we needed more resources on the Caribbean side of Central America and had to move a cutter through the Canal. To move forces between 2nd and 3rd Fleet, means you're moving them between what is effectively the Joint Maritime Component Commander for U.S. Northern Command which requires an execute order to be signed by the Secretary of Defense. What we have in the Coast Guard is a structure with units where we need them within the operational commander's control without any recourse to the approval of higher authorities. In the past, if we were to move assets between the Atlantic and the Pacific areas, we needed to get approval from Coast Guard headquarters. The value added of having that done, of being able to move that down to a global operations synchronizer is significant for a couple reasons. It increases flexibility and it cuts down on the amount of time it takes to make the decision to deploy the forces where you need them.

**Has the Deployable Operations Group (DOG) faced a major test yet or at least rehearsed on a life-like scale?**

The Deployable Operations Group stood up in July of 2007 and is probably the earliest, most demonstrable success of Modernization. We aligned all of our deployable specialized forces under a single flag command and while there has not been a single huge operation they've been involved in, they have sustained law enforcement detachments all over the world from drug interdiction in the Caribbean to piracy boardings off the Horn of Africa. They've sustained water-side security at Guantanamo, Cuba, for detainee operations and have supported a number of forward and domestic deployments in support of military outloads from the United States and in-theater in Kuwait. We've unified our deployable specialized forces and have maneuvered them around in a more effective fashion. [DOG] has become the global synchronizer for our specialized forces in the same way that OPCOM has. A good example is that right now we have between 250 and 300 people deployed to Pittsburgh, [Pa.], for on-water support of the G20 Summit. We're also supporting the U.N. General Assembly.

**What would signal to you that your changes are taking hold - quantifiable savings in acquisition and supply chain management? Or, is there something you could detect during a unit visit that would demonstrate your ideas are being embraced?**

I'd say both are required and that one is going to be a leading indicator and one's probably going to be a lagging indicator. We had our entire Modernization

## Coast Guard Modernization Milestones

- Deployable Operations Group (DOG) Established – June 2007
- Acquisitions Directorate and Integrated Deepwater System Consolidated into CG-9 – June 2007
- Deputy Commandant for Operations Established – June 2008
- Five Logistics/Service Centers Established –
  - Aviation Logistics Center (ALC) – October 2008
  - Surface Forces Logistics Center (SFLC) – January 2009
  - C4IT Service Center (C4ITSC) – February 2009
  - Shore Infrastructure Logistics Center (SILC) – February 2009
  - Personnel Service Center (PSC) – March 2009
- Asset Project Office (APO) Established – January 2009
- Legal Services Command (LSC) Established – April 2009
- Interim 2-Star Force Readiness Command (FORCECOM) Established – June 2009
- Atlantic Area watch section in the LANT/D5 Command Center Reached Full Operation Capability (FOC) – June 2009
- Maintenance Logistics Centers and Integrated Support Commands Disestablished – September 2009

effort reviewed by the National Academy of Public Administration. They had a couple of recommendations. One was to establish some benchmarks that would quantify exactly what Modernization was doing. Let me compare and contrast actual quantification versus perception of increased support.

We've taken our aviation logistics management and information system and deployed it to our smallboat community. We've taken the business process and the software that we use to support aircraft maintenance and transferred that to our smallboat bases. They universally understand the increase in asset visibility – where the small parts are, the readiness condition of their boats. They've embraced this thing as something good. In fact, if people leave a unit where we've made the conversion and go back to a unit where we haven't converted yet, we get feedback saying they wish they were back at their [previous] unit. These are voluntary statements being made by folks who've been struggling with years of maintenance issues with our smallboats.

As we move forward what we fully expect to find out is that we're probably not effectively [obtaining spares] for smallboats and we're

probably paying for parts we don't need. There are some parts we ought to be stocking that we aren't getting right now. That becomes quantifiable. We took a look at how many [requests] were being drawn on a particular part at our depot level and we found that there's a certain part that hadn't been requested from the field in three years. But we re-stock to the same levels every year and [the inventory] just keeps growing. Things like that allow you to take a procurement holiday, take that money and put it into real-time maintenance for what we really do need, draw the stocks down and start reallocating resources where they can have a better effect. I think that's something you can see.

**In your attempts to unify command and control, are you concerned that you may quash some of the subcultures that exist within the Coast Guard?**

There's always a tension between trying to create an organizational structure and discipline in terms of things like maintenance and logistics without stifling innovation and on-scene initiative. What we're trying to do is to create enabling capability that frees up operational units to focus more on what they're trying to do out there. If you're not spending

as much time trying to track parts for smallboats or close-out the books and take on those administrative burdens, you have more time to train and become more proficient at what you do. If you've looked at *Publication 1*, our doctrinal publication, one of the operating principles of the Coast Guard is the principle of on-scene initiative. That's what brought all those helicopters to New Orleans and allowed us to save over 33,000 people without any overt command and control from headquarters. It happened as a reflexive function of our training. What we want to do is to empower that and expand that through the support structure rather than impinge on it. I think we're there. Everybody understands that they have a duty to act out there. We're just allowing them to be more effective in how they act.

**Do you anticipate any problems with Congressional authorization of the Modernization command restructuring and if so, can you still go forward with the changes you envision?**

We can do everything that's envisioned by Modernization with the exception of establishing Operations Command and disestablishing the two current area commands. We've already established the Force Readiness Command as a two-star position. It's up and operating. We want to elevate that to a three star position. The one thing we cannot do without legislative authority is to do away with the designation of the Atlantic and Pacific area commands and replace them with Operations Command. Functionally, we can do everything else.

**Has anyone in the Service told you that they're not onboard with Modernization as planned? Would such an opinion change your vision?**

I'd make two observations. If you're challenged with resources in getting the job done before Modernization, you can mitigate some of the impact of resource shortfalls but you may not be able to change all of them. So in a program where somebody is being funded at a level that doesn't increase after Modernization they may say, 'You didn't solve my problem.' But frankly, that's a problem everybody in the Coast Guard has. What I have heard is that we've replaced one set of acronyms with another. I think the question everybody has is, when we turn the switch on Modernization, will we still have the same support? The answer is, not only will you get the same support but over time as we stand up these new business processes, it ought to get better. To the extent that we can achieve efficiencies and flow resources back into the Coast Guard, we think that we may be able to attack some of these resource problems where we've been unsuccessful in getting the appropriations we need.

**You're an avid cyclist. Are you thinking about Modernization while you're riding your bike?**

That's how I used my time this morning when I rode my bike in.

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