

United States Coast Guard Modernization Overview

By Scott R. Gourley

Designed to enhance the way that the Coast Guard does business, the ongoing Coast Guard Modernization process is developing and implementing a new operational structure that is more agile, flexible, and responsive to the realities of a rapidly changing world.

According to Rear Adm. Jody A. Breckenridge, director of the Coast Guard's Strategic Transformation Team, the Service's Modernization process reflects several factors supported by one key underlying reality.

"It's true that we're fortunate with the commandant that we have; his vision; his outreach; his understanding of the Department of Homeland Security and Department of Defense; the position of the Coast Guard in the federal government; and the value-added proposition that the Coast Guard offers to the American public," she observed. "But the bottom line is that the real reason we are doing this is because it's simply good government and the right thing to do."

Acknowledging that the process might feel to some "like we're exposing some of the worst parts of our organization," Breckenridge is quick to clarify the reality that "We are *not* an organization that's falling apart or broken. We're an organization that does offer a value proposition. But we're nowhere near where we need to be. We succeed today because we have some very good people who have developed some 'work-arounds.'

"We have to look from now to the future," she added. "And, quite frankly, if we want to remain relevant, if we want to position our people to be able to focus on mission execution and do the tremendous job that they do across their 11 mission program areas, then we need to change."

Breckenridge observes that the current Modernization effort builds upon several previous Coast Guard transformation efforts, including the "streamlining" efforts of the mid-1990s.

"Streamlining was driven by a need to save billets," she explained. "We saved those billets and we put a pretty good construct in place. But we really didn't create performance standards that went with that organization. We never base-lined from a business perspective across that organization. And we never really looked at 'a' particular business line and whether we were setting it up for success."

Subsequent stages in building the foundation for the Modernization process included the issuance of 10 "Commandant Intent Action Orders" (CIAO) by Adm. Thad W. Allen. Although aligned with the prior Coast Guard organization, the task listings looked across the entire system and,



Coast Guard Commandant Adm. Thad W. Allen issues his State of the Coast Guard address at the National Press Club in Washington, D.C., Feb. 14, 2008. His speech focused on Coast Guard leadership's vision for the future of the Service and its Modernization, which includes five broad Modernization efforts.

supported by additional study and analysis, were combined into five Coast Guard Modernization efforts in the spring of 2007.

The five broad Modernization efforts include: Transformation of the Headquarters staff and financial management systems; Development of a Deputy Commandant for Operations to align policy and planning across the 11 mandated mission programs; Development of a Deputy Commandant for Mission Support with responsibility for logistics product/service lines and processes; Streamlining of field Command and Control structure to a Coast Guard Operations Command; and Development of a Force Readiness Command that will be responsible for readiness capabilities of the Service.



Coast Guard Station Little Creek, Va., accepted the first 45-foot Response Boat-Medium (RB-M) in the Coast Guard April 7, 2008. The RB-M will be one of the key assets helping improve world-wide readiness and responsiveness along with the Modernization effort to establish the Coast Guard Force Readiness Command.

Offering the example of how the Modernization process will impact the mission support arena, Breckenridge explained, “We have to have configuration management across every single asset line. We have to apply a standard business practice across all of our assets and our service lines. We have got to drive data up to the enterprise levels so that, when we look at the next dollar spent, we can decide: Should we spend it on a C4I system? Should we invest it in buying one more of some particular type of asset or capability? Should we invest it in keeping something that’s already in the fleet continuing to run? We don’t have data systems that allow us across all of our assets to do that comparison. We have some in aviation that are very good and we’re not as good in other arenas. But we’ve got to be able to pull that information up. We are going to stay true to that while continuing to provide services to the field.”

Reflecting on the example of Modernization changes within the Force Readiness arena, she added, “If we look across our construct today, every level in our organization has responsibility for readiness. And when there’s a readiness issue, whether in our workforce or with an asset, there’s no one person below him that the commandant can look to who is responsible for fixing the problem and making things happen. So we’re going to create a Force Readiness Command in the field.”

Breckenridge described the original 10 CIAOs as 10 “narrow stovepipes,” noting that early stages of the Modernization efforts actually resulted in five “broadened stovepipes.”

“We talked to each other, but we weren’t planning together,” she admitted, adding that a logic model was then applied to study the functionality of how the five efforts related to each other.

“And it occurred to us that, in fact, we were really talking about a system,” she noted. “You can’t touch any single piece without it impacting a function and an entity across that [system]. So we said, ‘We can’t just

talk to each other. We have to plan together and we have to look across how to synch everything so that we get the right capabilities in the right places, because if we don’t, it affects another entity.”

“So this is really a holistic systems approach to our upper-level command and control structure and our entire mission support array,” she said.

Looking toward the implementation of the Modernization efforts, Breckenridge envisions a continuum of at least five years.

“We have got to complete process reviews. In the Mission Support arena, for example, we have more than 500 processes to thoroughly analyze. So this is a long-term journey and it’s really important to understand that this is a holistic systems look, infusing good business practices into our organization, to make us better,” she said.

When asked about potential challenges to Modernization efforts, she was quick to spotlight the existing service culture.

“When you tell people you are changing things, because they are often personally vested in it, it is often taken as if they were doing something wrong or they are failing,” she explained. “But they are not. We are causing them to develop ‘work-arounds’ because, in some cases, we didn’t put the right processes in place up front.”

“The second piece is, when you drive to an enterprise level, and talk about enterprise requirements, there’s a feeling of a loss of control. And there will be some of that, because we will be changing some of their standards. So how we balance all of that while maintaining our on-scene initiative, is going to be a significant challenge for us, both from the perspective of our workforce and just from managing the process as we move through,” she added.

“Change is always hard and we’re uncomfortable with this,” she said. “But, you know, that’s really not a bad place to be, because you’re careful with what you do; it forces you to take deliberate steps; and we take a



The Ocean Sentry, HC-144A, is the first all-new aircraft delivered to the Coast Guard as part of the Deepwater project's progressive modernization and recapitalization of aging legacy assets.

much broader look than we otherwise would. Our culture is to jump in and fix things. And that causes you to jump to a solution. But, because we are uncomfortable with this, we are being a lot more thoughtful sometimes than we may have otherwise been."

While the Modernization efforts have obvious impact on the Coast Guard itself, Breckenridge acknowledged a parallel significance for the American public.

"First of all, we take as given, that we serve the American public and that with the dollars that they provide to us to do our job we have to ensure that we provide the best return on investment for whatever money we get. And, quite frankly, as we look at it now, I think our feeling is that we are going to find, when we do these business process reviews, that there is room for improvement."

Emphasizing how hard the Service is working to bring those processes up to date, she added, "We want the public to have confidence that whatever dollars we are given are good investments; that we are a value return; and that we are relevant. As we look at things, we don't want the American public to feel that they don't get good service from the Coast Guard. We also don't want them to feel that they are making investments in an organization that doesn't have good business practices. We think we are a 'world-class' organization. But can we be better? We know that we can be better. And we are committed to making ourselves better!

"I personally feel that, as an organization, we are very, very lucky in the people that we get to serve in our Coast Guard. One of the things that draws people in and keeps people involves two basic issues: People like the missions that we have; and they like the people that they get to serve with. What keeps people in? People like the mission and they like the people. We need to make sure that we are doing well by them so that we are giving them the right policies and the right tactics, techniques, and procedures so that they can go out and do their jobs safely and so that they can do what the American public needs them to do, to keep our economy moving and to protect our nation," she said.

She concluded, "The last thing I want to offer you in the way of change is to be very specific about what we are *not* changing, because I think that's as important as what we are changing. As we look across our organization, we are *not* changing our core values. We are *not* changing our Guardian Ethos. And we are *not* changing what we want out of our on-scene commanders in the way of on-scene initiative. That's what makes us unique. It's what makes us successful. It's what people saw in [Hurricane] Katrina. What we want to do is facilitate the development of that and make sure that we remove unnecessary responsibilities and administrative duties from our operational units, so that they are really focused on honing those operational skills and on mission execution."