

View From the Bridge

Adm. Bob Papp, Commandant

On Feb. 27, you delivered the State of the Coast Guard Address – what is the state of the Coast Guard?

My theme for the State of the Coast Guard was “Forward ... to the Horizon,” because it reflects where we are as a service. We’re looking, and leaning, forward. While we are still navigating uncertain and stormy seas, we will continue to prepare and adapt. With all of the talk of constrained budgets, deficits, and sequestration, we won’t let it get us down. Times of uncertain and stormy seas are when we go to work and when our country needs its Coast Guard. I have great confidence and optimism about where we are today and where we are headed. The source of that confidence is Coast Guardsmen – the men and women of the Coast Guard.

Our ability to respond so effectively to Hurricane Sandy provides a clear example our service’s enduring value to the nation. Our missions also ensure adherence to a system of rules and sustain the mechanisms designed to provide for the security, safety, and prosperity of our nation and all those who use the maritime domain. This is the daily work of government that provides us with both order and opportunity on the oceans. In short, what we are doing is providing maritime governance, which is critical to our national security. So despite some challenges we face today, there will always be a strong need for the Coast Guard’s unique capabilities and authorities.

What has the Coast Guard accomplished in the Arctic and what are your lessons learned/ways ahead?

Due to increasing Arctic commerce, ecotourism, and oil exploration activity, which all bring attendant risks and demand for Coast Guard operations, we expanded our efforts with Operation Arctic Shield 2012. In fact, this marked the first time the Coast Guard has sustained a multi-mission presence on the [Alaska] North Slope throughout the Arctic summer season. This nine-month interagency operation consisted of outreach, operations, and assessment of capabilities, including the deployment of a national security cutter [CGC *Bertholf*] and two of our oceangoing, ice capable buoy tenders. We also surged two helicopters to Barrow [Alaska], 300 miles above the Arctic Circle.

Arctic Shield demonstrated ways we can mitigate and overcome long-range logistics chains, severe operating conditions, and the lack of physical and communications infrastructure. We also reinforced the importance of partnerships with tribal and state governments, learning from the native peoples who have lived and worked in this remote region for centuries. In short, it provided insights into how we can better prepare our service to safely and effectively conduct Coast Guard Arctic operations.



U.S. Coast Guard photo

For example, given the lack of infrastructure in the remote reaches of the Arctic, our national security cutter provided us with the offshore infrastructure required for sustained presence. It served as a floating Coast Guard mobile command and control platform, able to carry and launch smallboats and helicopters to conduct and coordinate the full range of Coast Guard missions.

We are also ensuring our current and future icebreaking fleet capabilities are adequate for U.S. ice breaking needs. In December, the cutter *Polar Star* completed a multiyear rehabilitation and will return to active service this year as the nation's only heavy icebreaker. Along with [the CGC] *Healy*, *Polar Star* will remain in service for the next seven to 10 years as we continue work to build the next-generation heavy icebreaker capable of supporting diverse requirements in the polar regions.

Finally, to ensure alignment of our efforts, we will soon release our first comprehensive Arctic Strategy. This Coast Guard Arctic Strategy will focus on our three main priorities: improving awareness, modernizing governance, and broadening partnerships.

What do fast response cutters (FRCs) mean for the Coast Guard?

FRCs are proving to be very capable near our coasts enforcing border security, interdicting drugs, upholding immigration laws, preventing terrorism, and ensuring resiliency to disasters. With communication systems that are fully compatible with both our DHS [Department of Homeland Security] and DoD [Department of Defense] partners and other improvements, they are more capable than the aging 110-foot patrol boat fleet they are replacing. In concert with the fleet of 87-foot coastal patrol boats, the new FRCs will round out our patrol boat forces.

FRCs are all named after Coast Guard enlisted heroes whose deeds and lives exemplify our core values of Honor, Respect, and Devotion to Duty. Each cutter represents a powerful story about the long blue line of distinguished Coast Guard men and women who have gone before us. FRCs will play an important role in honoring our heritage of selfless and courageous service.

What are some things the Coast Guard has done well and in what areas does it have work to do?

Hurricane Sandy really put the Coast Guard to the test and we did a superb job responding to a historic storm, especially considering that many of our responders and their families were also victims of the storm. One important element of our success was our modernized mission support structure, including the new director of Operational Logistics which actively managed all mission support response resources. This support organization was placed under the operational control of the Atlantic Area commander, resulting in better coordinated and more rapid support.

As per my recently released "Commandant's SITREP 2013" [situation report], sustaining mission excellence remains our highest priority. We continue to make progress integrating our shore-based and maritime patrol forces with our deployable specialized forces to form our Maritime Trident of Forces.

We also saw the remarkable value of our unit ombudsmen, volunteers who helped take care of Coast Guard families who were affected by the storm.

In your State of the Coast Guard Address you emphasized proficiency. What plans/vision do you have for Coast Guard proficiency on the near horizon?

Proficiency remains the enduring anchor of the Coast Guard – proficiency in craft, proficiency in leadership, and disciplined initiative. We must master these three things. There is no short cut. Proficiency begins with the training, education, qualification, and certification provided by the service. Once an individual is qualified, we also provide advanced knowledge, experience, and seasoning. Beyond that, the individual Coast Guardsman is duty bound to provide the remaining elements to the nation, the Coast Guard, and their shipmates: self-discipline and voluntary adherence to a set of rules or governing standards, sustained drive to achieve higher levels of excellence, and the continuous pursuit of mastery of craft.

We will continue to provide these to our people, but I am increasingly concerned that shrinking budgets will impact our ability to pay for travel and training and provide the necessary extra boat and aircraft hours. We must continually seek smarter, innovative, and economical ways to provide these experiences. Our people deserve it and our service to the public demands it.

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