

Leadership at All Levels

Interview With USCG Commandant Adm. Robert E. Kramek

Sea Power Editor in Chief James D. Hessman and Contributing Editor Vincent C. Thomas Jr. met with Adm. Robert E. Kramek, USCG, shortly after he succeeded Adm. J. William Kime as Coast Guard commandant, to discuss his views on how his multimission service will meet the challenge of carrying out all of its assigned duties in an era when ever-increasing mission requirements are complicated by major reductions in both manpower and funding. Following is the transcript of that discussion.

SEA POWER: Your first message to the Coast Guard said one of your goals is to "Meet the mandate to streamline with no reduction in essential services." How will you be able to do that?

KRAMEK: I have been given a target by the Office of Management and Budget to reduce the Coast Guard approximately 3 percent a year for the next four years. I think I can do that.

That's a total of 12 percent?

KRAMEK: It's 12 percent over four years. My first effort to streamline, which I would classify as a good business practice, is to identify some Coast Guard stations that need to be changed.

I'll give you an example. We have about 170 small search-and-rescue Coast Guard stations nationwide. Many of those were put in 50-100 years ago, when we used to row out to save people or use breeches buoys and stuff like that. Those stations were put in to have a two-hour response time. If you were in distress and were to call, I can get there in two hours and save 90 percent of the lives and 70 percent of the property.

That has been our standard that we have met with the public for the last 20 years. Now we have 27-knot motor lifeboats that

can roll over in the surf, high-speed helicopters, and all of this sophisticated infrastructure. If you would draw a response circle around each of these stations, they would overlap. So some people we can get to in 15-20 minutes.

That's good, but that's not the standard, that's not the business standard. And I want to make those stations tangential, just touching each other. When you do that, some of the stations will go away. In places like Florida and the Gulf Coast, or the West Coast, people are working 82-84 hours a week because the stations are so far apart. But in some regions they are overlapping, or they are seasonal. I am trying to make them all tangential. I'll use the resources I save—there are about 40 stations that need to be closed or changed—so at the high-workload stations I can get the work week down to 68 hours instead of 82.

But I have not been able to close one station. Not one! No one wants to see a Coast Guard station go, even if it hasn't saved a life in a couple of years. I am finding that almost everything I have recommended so far on these business decisions, in order to streamline and meet my target, is meeting with disapproval on the Hill. So I need to work closely with Congress to get these things approved.

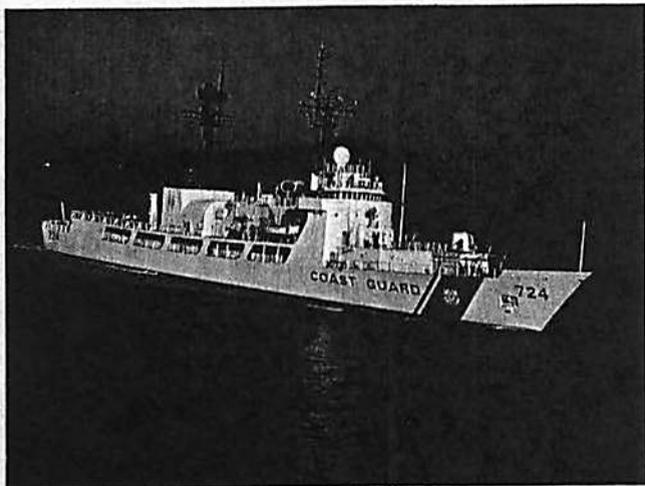
That's a rock and a hard place!

KRAMEK: Well, I think I am going to have to show the Congress and the public that I can maintain the service level with these changes. Otherwise, it is going to be most difficult to do the streamlining.

A question about op tempo: The increase in sanctions against Haiti gives you more workload. The inability to close stations means you can't cut your workload there. Are you at the point where some people are leaving the service



Adm. Robert E. Kramek



USCG

"What we are doing [in the high-endurance cutter replacement program] is looking 15 years into the future, then taking a look at the whole spectrum of technology. ... These changing technologies may change the number of ships you need." This photo shows the high-endurance cutter USCGC Munro underway.

because they and/or their families are saying: "We are too busy too much of the time"?

KRAMEK: No, they are not leaving, but they are working too hard. We are at an all-time high with regard to retention rates right now. There's an interesting thing happening. We thought that this increased op tempo was just going to be a surge for 3-4 months. Our people are used to surging, and it usually doesn't drive them out. This surge in Haiti has been going almost two years now, and it still is at a very, very high op tempo. Essentially, though, what I have done is pull some ships from operations in drug law enforcement and the North Atlantic fisheries patrol. And, in fact, I started using West-Coast ships to take care of the increased op tempo.

Last year we ran the ships too hard. People were underway well beyond their deployable days; we try to target 185 days a year, and they were over 200, 210. Even though I am replacing them with ships from other missions I don't see any relief right now.

What about the new Chinese migrations?

KRAMEK: I'll give you an example from this morning of what is happening in terms of migrants and other missions. We had several Haitian interdictions last night and were in the process of bringing them to the new migrant processing center in Kingston, Jamaica. We have a couple of drug cases underway, one of which I can't discuss with you, but it is in the Caribbean and is a multi-unit operation in support of Joint Task Force 4. At the same time, we have just interdicted a Chinese smuggling operation 350 miles off the Virginia coast, and actually caught a Chinese fishing vessel—that claimed to be fishing—transferring over 100 Chinese illegal migrants to a U.S. fishing vessel. So we seized the U.S. fishing vessel and are bringing it into port. And we are working with the People's Republic of China to get permission to board their vessel. That is with the State Department right now.

These things are ongoing all the time, and I tell my people when I visit with them that we are very, very lucky,

because we are in high demand right now. What I am concerned about is that we are going to work them so hard that they are not going to be happy, productive employees any more. And right now we are working a bit harder than I want to.

We are not at that level in the Pacific Northwest. We are not near that level in the Great Lakes, or at the tempo we were this winter because of icebreaking.

But that is the value of the Coast Guard to the taxpayer. We are multitemission, we can surge from one mission to another, and I think we give a lot of bang for the buck because of that.

But can you keep on doing it? One thing that makes it possible are your ships. When do you get funding for new ships to replace your aging cutters?

KRAMEK: We have already started. We have started what we call the high-endurance cutter [WHEC] and medium-endurance cutter [WMEC] replacement program. The Hamilton class is the high-endurance cutter class. The Reliance class is the medium-endurance cutter class. We all know in the naval services that it takes 10-12 years or more to replace a capital ship from the time of your conceptual design and mission analysis until you actually commission the first one.

Last year, I stood up the WHEC/WMEC Capabilities Study. I have staffed it in the Office of Law Enforcement



USCG

"Our people are used to surging, and it usually doesn't drive them out. This surge in Haiti has been going almost two years now, and it still is at a very, very high op tempo." These photos show Haitian immigrants interdicted by the Coast Guard awaiting processing, and a USCG airman preparing to drop supplies to the M/V East Wood which, loaded with Chinese nationals, was interdicted in the Pacific last year.

and Defense Operations. And I have a mission analysis going on now that will define what capabilities vessels are going to have to have in the open-ocean environment to meet the missions of the Coast Guard 10-15 years from now. In about two years we will actually start the design of those vessels, but right now we are doing mission analysis.

What numbers are you talking about?

KRAMEK: I am not looking at a one-for-one replacement. That's what mission analysis is all about. Because of technology it might be that I need a different type of open-ocean platform. The 378s [378-foot cutters] were designed to be weather stations, to replace our old weather-station vessels. It just turned out that by the time they came on board the weather stations were replaced by satellites. But suddenly we had a North Pacific fisheries mission and a drug law-enforcement mission, and they have served us very well in those missions. But they were never designed for that.

What we are doing is looking 15 years into the future, then taking a look at the whole spectrum of technology to decide what combinations of things we need to replace their capability in that environment. These changing technologies and changing ways of doing business may change the numbers of ships you need. We still are going to need open-ocean-environment vessels. But I am not sure how many. It might not be one-for-one.

Is anyone likely to tell you that "You won't need that many now, because they have more inherent capability"?

KRAMEK: No, I don't think so. We have so much work, and there are so many missions for us to carry out—and we can't carry them all out now—that I don't think we will have a problem replacing the numbers we have.

Do you have DOD and Navy input on the defense features of these ships?

KRAMEK: Absolutely. Everything that we do has a DOD input, because we have national security requirements. We are in some of the CINCs' plans for different types of things to do that are within our area of expertise. And in some

cases, like the Hamilton class, a lot of their renovation costs were paid for by the Navy—that was during a previous downsizing of the Navy. And when the Navy was down near 400 ships the last time, it looked at the Hamilton class as a low-cost light-frigate alternative for the battle group. The Navy funded the combat systems modernization that was part of the renovation. We moved CIC [combat information center] down to the third deck, put on Harpoon, CIWS, the Mark 92 fire-control system. We are in another situation now where the Navy is again reducing its size, and it actually makes some of our assets a little bit more important to national security than they were.

Is the capability study also looking at icebreakers—will the *Healy* be one of a class?

KRAMEK: In my view, the *Healy* will be one of a class, because it will be built mainly to support the scientific community. The Coast Guard has two icebreaking missions. One is in support of domestic commerce. That really is what you saw this winter on the Great Lakes and the Hudson River and other waterways.

International icebreaking is our other mission: to support national security, to resupply both the Arctic and the Antarctic, and to support the National Science Foundation and other scientific users. That's what the Polar-class icebreakers do. I feel that the *Healy* probably will be one of a class to fulfill that mission.

The icebreaking study that we have just started, however, is in support of domestic commerce. What do we really need on the Great Lakes? I know what we needed last year, but commerce changes on the Great Lakes, and the shippers would like to have their navigation season open longer. So we have to take a look at what the economics of the Great Lakes are, then decide what mix of vessels we need to keep the commerce flowing year round.

We have to keep the *Mackinaw* running one more year. We are thinking about going in with the Canadians on a lease of an icebreaker for a year, whereby they will use it in the Arctic in the summertime, and take care of our Thule, Greenland, operation, and we will use it in the Great Lakes in the winter.

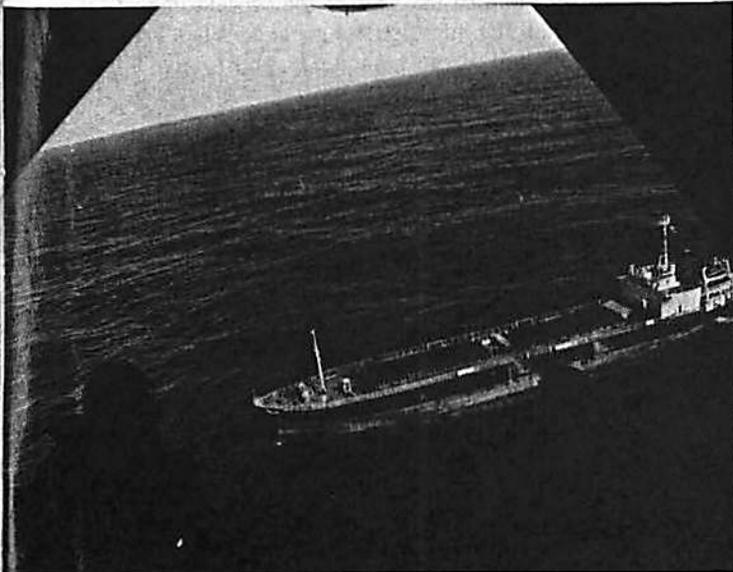
Are Russian icebreakers a possibility?

KRAMEK: Not yet, but I just met with the head of the Russian Border Guard. We talked about icebreaking and fisheries patrols. I said to him that in the Bering Sea, where we have a lot of common interests, "There is no sense in your having 10 ships on your side of the 1867 treaty line and me having 10 ships on my side. Why don't we have 10 together, five of yours and five of mine?"

He is interested in that, so we put some protocols together, and those protocols are now going to be reviewed by the State Department and by Russia, as the prelude to follow-up meetings in Moscow this fall, where I hope to reach some agreements with him on fisheries patrol, icebreaking, environmental protection, carrying out some oil-pollution drills together, and search-and-rescue agreements.

Could those protocols also lead to binational manning in the Bering Sea, and perhaps elsewhere?

KRAMEK: I would not say binational manning, but they



USCGC MOSBY



"The Coast Guard has two icebreaking missions, one in support of domestic commerce ... [and one] to support national security and scientific users." Shown here is a Coast Guard Dolphin helicopter preparing to lower cargo to the flight deck of one of the USCG's two polar icebreakers now in service.

could lead to a shiprider program, like we have with China. The Coast Guard is very involved in international affairs. There are 115 nations that want to learn from us, because their navies are coast guards. And what they do is coast guard.

Is that figure up markedly from 4-5 years ago?

KRAMEK: Yes. The State Department funds most of these endeavors and initiatives. I provide the people and the expertise; they usually pay for the costs.

How many countries are training with the U.S. Coast Guard at any one time?

KRAMEK: Probably three or four. But I was just briefed the other day on the fact that we are going to go around the entire coast of South America and the West Coast of Africa this summer, in conjunction with the Navy, providing training to nations along the way.

During a recent call on Admiral Gee [Rear Adm. George N. Gee, commander, Joint Task Force 4] I learned about the joint interagency task forces that will be in the forefront of international drug interdiction and of your role in that new organization. How will this organization differ from what exists today?

KRAMEK: Besides being commandant of the Coast Guard I have been designated the U.S. interdiction coordinator in the Western Hemisphere for the war on drugs. I am responsible to the president and to the drug czar, Dr. Lee Brown.

Is that your direct chain of command?

KRAMEK: For the interdiction program, yes. And I have

been given a "purple" staff to do it. I have a counterpart in the State Department, for international narcotics matters. The two of us work for Dr. Brown and are responsible to the president for the interdiction program.

My job is to look at the national drug strategy, then to see that all the agencies responsible for the interdiction portion of that strategy are doing what they are supposed to do, that they have sufficient resources to do it, that they have asked for enough to do it, that their budgets reflect that, and that they are wisely allocating the resources that they have. I am supposed to coordinate them in that endeavor. I don't have command and control of them. I am not their CINC.

But if you were convinced that more assets are needed in the Caribbean for drug interdiction, what is your chain of command to get them?

KRAMEK: I would ask the CINCs to ask for more assets to do their job, and if they tell me they can't get them, then I go to Dr. Brown and tell him: "We can't carry the interdiction program any farther because we haven't sufficient interdiction assets. And this is what it means to the drug war as a whole." The war on drugs is a balance between attacking supply and demand. I think there is a pretty good balance right now. The new policy is a gradual shift from interdicting the smugglers in the transit zone, chasing them in the planes, chasing their ships, chasing them in the Caribbean, toward more emphasis on stopping it in the source countries.

Are you likely to lose some interdiction assets as a result of the change in policy?

KRAMEK: Yes, we are losing them now. I am concerned that there are people in various agencies, but mostly in the Congress, that were expecting this change and already have made preemptive reductions that may be too much. But I have just started to look at this. I'm in the process of making the rounds of all the interdiction agencies. When I give Dr. Brown my first full report, I should be able to give him an accurate picture of what I see.

A recent ROA [Reserve Officers Association] study focused on the fact that Coast Guard Reserve strength had been reduced each year for the past seven years, that last year Congress authorized 10,000 Reserves for the Coast Guard but funded only 8,000, and that, as of now, if the proposed FY 1995 budget is approved, your Reserve strength will be cut another 1,000. If that cut holds, won't your flexibility and resilience be reduced dangerously?

KRAMEK: An interesting thing happened with the Reserve program. The Reserves for years were very much linked to Department of Defense mobilization requirements. The great number of our Reserves are justified because there are requirements in the CINCs' plans for us to do certain things. When the global threat changed, and we were looking at a

littoral forward movement on somebody else's shore line, the needs and numbers for our Reserves reduced. So we had a reduction down to about the 8,000 level.

But we should not go below that. Our budget calls for 7,000 this year, but that was strictly a budgetary decision. We were not given enough funds in the budget process to fund a Reserve of 8,000. But I think Congress is going to restore that. We need 8,000 to carry out our mission. It was a budget move to reduce to 7,000, and we told them what we couldn't do. I don't think our committees on the Hill liked that, and I believe we will be told to maintain our Reserve at 8,000.

With money?

KRAMEK: No. I hired Rear Adm. Rudy Peschel, commander, Ninth Coast Guard District—he and the Reserve flags I have headed up a study group to show me how to reorganize the whole field organization of the Reserve. The Reserve was spending too much money on its own administration. I am going to meld that with active-duty forces. I hope to be able to save enough money to pay for the extra thousand Reserves, without asking for any more money. The Reserves are going to help me, and augment more of my stations, and be integrated more with Coast Guard stations.

What about your AC&I [acquisition, construction & improvement] funding? You haven't achieved your ACI goals for years, and are not going to this year, are you?

KRAMEK: No, it is too low. I thought we really were going to be able to have it higher because this was part of the mandate for change on building up the infrastructure of the country. Most of our AC&I costs are [for] shipbuilding, and shipbuilding in the United States is not very robust any more. We need between \$500 million and \$600 million a year to recapitalize our capital plant, which probably is worth about \$17 billion. To replace it—shore plant, ships, and aircraft—takes about \$500 million or \$600 million a year. In the last 10 years we haven't had that, but we always have been most generously provided with extra funds from the Department of Defense. Now that DOD's budget is declining, I don't see any help coming from DOD alone. And I expect we probably will be 30-40 percent short of what we need to recapitalize. I don't like that, and it is a

problem.

I have put together an executive business plan for the Coast Guard for the next four years that was ready to roll on 1 June, the day I relieved Admiral Kime. I also learned a bit from Mike Boorda [Adm. Jeremy M. Boorda, the new chief of naval operations], when I saw how well he communicated in the first 48 hours. I'm trying to do exactly the same thing. In essence, what I have done is to put together the goals and objectives for the Coast Guard. That will meet both the administration's mandate and our strategic plan.

I also had one other thing done, an external scan of the Coast Guard. I hired outside consultants, and they interviewed, among others, all my senior officers, officers in charge, my chief petty officers—five different major groups.

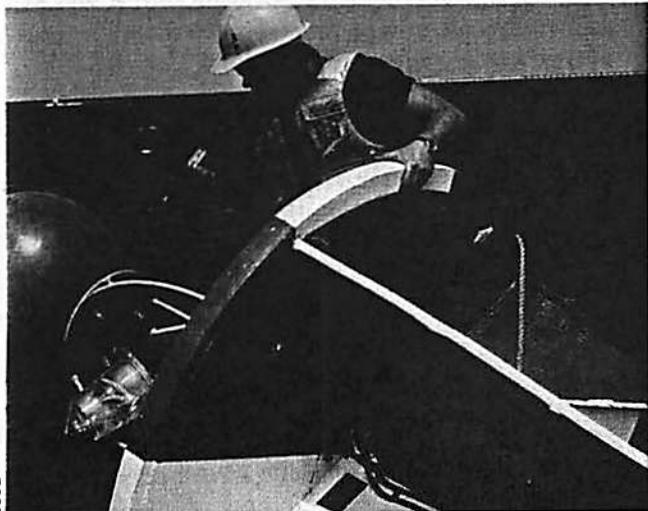
Who did the survey?

KRAMEK: ODI [Organization Dynamic Inc.], an outside consultant that helped us put together our Total Quality Management program. So I had one circle, if you will, that



USCG

"We have so much work, and there are so many missions for us to carry out—and we can't carry them all out now—that I don't think we will have a problem replacing the numbers we have." These photos show Coast Guardsmen inspecting and repairing buoys, and monitoring the flow of crude oil spilled from a grounded tanker.



USCG



USCG

"The real bread and butter of the Coast Guard is search and rescue—life-saving. We like to consider ourselves the Guardians of the Sea." This picture shows a USCG HH-60J Jayhawk medium-range-recovery helicopter on a search-and-rescue training exercise.



represented the knowledge of the Coast Guard, on goals and objectives, as I saw it. And then I had the external scan—what our people out there think I should be doing, what they need, what they want to hear from me, how I should communicate with them. With that, I have created another circle. And I have taken a look at the difference between those circles, to see what I have to do. I now have put together a set of goals and objectives and leadership principles that moves those circles right on top of one another. So when I go out—and I am going to spend my time in the field—I am going to be the outside guy and visiting our units, our areas, our districts to see what the Coast Guard needs, because my job is to get resources for the Coast Guard.

People always want to know how they can help and be part of it. And I tell them that what I want them to do is be leaders in all parts of the organization. I need them to work with me at all levels to make some of these things go.

Have you convinced the secretary of Transportation [Federico F. Pena] that he should be a deepwater proponent?

KRAMEK: I believe the secretary has an excellent appreciation that the Coast Guard is an important intermodal player in the Department of Transportation. He knows that 90 percent of our commerce in this country is carried in ships. I think he was astounded to find out how much of a part waterborne commerce plays. He asked: "What does the Coast Guard have to do with intermodal transportation? Why are you guys in the Department of Transportation?"

I told him: "You need to go to Miami. Just get into a helicopter, 5,000 feet above the port of Miami, and look down on a Saturday morning. You will see 40 cruise ships, huge ships, and they all are loading and unloading passengers. All those passengers link up with other modes of transportation: highways, mass transit, airlines, rails, etc. The cruise-ship industry brings \$10 billion a year to the Miami and South Florida region. The Coast Guard is an important part of that industry. We inspect the ships. We put in the aids to navigation. We make sure they meet the safety-of-life-at-sea convention and all the other regulations to make sure they don't pollute, etc. But if they are not linked right to the other modes, it is not a viable transportation system."

There was a story in the papers recently that the Coast Guard might get sued over a list of ship owners, operators, and managers whose vessels are targets for checks each time they enter U.S. waters. Could you clarify this situation for our readers?

KRAMEK: I need to explain to make it clear what is happening. What I see in the media is the use of an incorrect word, "targeted." No one is being "targeted" for anything. And I see the word "substandard" being used as referring to classification societies, owners, and operators.

There is no such thing as "substandard classification societies, owners, and operators." There is such a thing as substandard vessels. For every American-flag vessel that sails in our waters, we have 14 foreign vessels. With some of these foreign vessels, when we do safety inspections, we have had to intervene because they do not meet international standards. So we have looked at our records and said: "These substandard ships primarily belong to these countries, these are the owners and operators, and as long as they continue to operate without improving, we are going to keep inspecting them first." So if I have my choice, when that ship comes into port, of inspecting a ship which has had interventions, versus one that has a perfect record, I would go for the one that has the poor record.

Anything else we haven't focused on yet?

KRAMEK: The real bread and butter of the Coast Guard is search and rescue—life-saving. We like to consider ourselves the Guardians of the Sea. If you were to add up all the benefits versus the cost of the Coast Guard, as I like to tell the secretary, we are a good deal for the American taxpayer. We return more than \$4 in benefits for every dollar invested in us. The search-and-rescue program alone pays for our whole cost. We are involved in eight or nine or 10 different missions—saving lives, stopping drugs from coming in, marine environmental protection, aids to navigation—and they all are pluses to the public. And we can shift from one to the other as emergencies and contingencies arise. Our roots are in the maritime environment and the seagoing trades. And we are very good at what we do in that area and consider ourselves the premier maritime service in the world.

With that 4:1 cost/benefit ratio you could make a good case for increasing your budget.

KRAMEK: What I need Congress to do is approve the president's budget request for us. I have convinced the department and OMB and the president this year to submit a budget that is good for the Coast Guard. It includes the streamlining, but I am willing to do the streamlining because I think it is something we need to do as a responsible government agency. However, Congress is thinking right now about giving me a lot less than the president's budget, and that is what is going to hurt.

Are you prepared to go back and say: "These are the missions I have to knock off"?

KRAMEK: Yes. I can streamline and not reduce services to the public. But not if I get a budget below what the president requested. ■

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ABOUT THE COVER

The Coast Guard icebreaker *Polar Star* cuts through an ice mass on a mission to clear transit lanes through northern waters. (Photo by Neelon Crawford—see page 6.) For information on the USCG's next polar icebreaker, see James Thach's article beginning on page 37, and interview, beginning on page 11, with new Coast Guard Commandant Adm. Robert E. Kramek about his vision for carrying out the USCG's numerous responsibilities at a time of increasing mission requirements and diminishing budgets.

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