

Coast Guard Vice Commandant Vice Admiral Sally Brice-O'Hara's Remarks

at the

Celebration of the Coast Guard Reserve's 70th Anniversary Coast Guard Headquarters

February 23, 2011

Good morning everyone!

Thank you for joining us as we recognize the 70th Birthday of the United States Coast Guard Reserve.

I'd like to especially thank our many DOD partners who have joined us today. We can't say enough about how much we appreciate your support, especially in the way you help us convey the message about the importance of a strong, well-resourced Reserve Force.

I want to start off my remarks with a story... one that I suspect will sound familiar.

It's springtime, and a region of our country is experiencing a disaster ... there's acute tragedy: lives have been lost already... but it's apparent that most of the mounting damage will be far more widespread.

Regional newspapers first cover the story, and then the entire nation is watching. The damage quickly builds and spreads - affecting thousands: families, neighborhood businesses, entire regional industries...

The Coast Guard is among the first to respond, and is doing its best to try to minimize the damage - but the local contingents of Active Duty Coast Guardsmen become overtaxed by the size and scope of the job they are asked to do.

You know what happens next - the Commandant picks up his phone and calls up the Coast Guard Reserve....

No doubt, the first thing that many of our Reserve members did on that day in April when they got the call was to tell their families and their regular employers...

They tidied up their affairs, and reported for duty... they brought with them their training, their professionalism, and their initiative - and when they arrived, they did everything and anything that needs doing, making the rest of the Coast Guard and the Nation proud.

The Admiral himself remarked that those Reservists performed with “unflagging zeal for the job at hand.”

Is that story familiar? It sounds like it could be a story from today, but the year was 1973! It was the first ever Title 14 activation of the Coast Guard Reserve – and the disaster was major flooding along the Mississippi and Missouri Rivers. Five thousand families were displaced, 19 people perished, and the regional farming industry was devastated.

The new law allowing for the emergency recall of the Coast Guard Reserve had only been around for six months...

It didn't take long for the nation to use it!

One-hundred-forty-three Reservists reported for active duty – they performed rescues, assisted with evacuations, and guarded levees. And they also manned oil booms to minimize the environmental impact of the disaster... just as many Reservists did this year.

Seventy years ago when the Reserve was founded, we could not have envisioned all the ways in which a *modern* Coast Guard Reserve would serve our Nation. In February of 1941, the Nation was gripped in the buildup to our inevitable entry into World War II.

When the War arrived for the U. S., 320 thousand Americans answered the call to serve in the Coast Guard Reserve – in fact, during that time, 9 of every 10 people serving on active duty in the Coast Guard was a Reservist.

Many women also answered the call to serve. The Coast Guard estimated it would need approximately 8 thousand in the Women's Reserve. Twelve thousand volunteered! And 10,000 served as SPARS, members of the Coast Guard Women's Reserve.

During the Vietnam Conflict, the Selected Reserve answered the call... and by this time, and since 1950, the Coast Guard Reserve had already begun to look more like something we would recognize today: it was a paid, drilling Reserve Force – one with its own mission specialty: Port Security.

It wasn't until 1980 that we needed another Title 14 Activation. That was the year of the Mariel Boat lift, when over 120 thousand Cubans took to the sea for the United States...

Again we turned to them, and again, the Coast Guard Reserve was ready and eager to serve.

The Reserve answered so well over the next two decades, that the Nation called more and more frequently:

Desert Storm. 9/11. Operation Iraqi Freedom. Operation Enduring Freedom Port-au-Prince. Deepwater Horizon.

I would say to the Reservists here today – you are not simply in our Rolodex. The Nation has you on speed dial!

You have become *indispensible* member of our team. An *expected* player and leader in every national and international response effort! You're there anytime our Coast Guard and our Department is called to lead national response efforts. In a world which increasingly needs a lot of "Response", you, the Coast Guard Reserve... ARE the Nation's Responder of Choice.

So, what does this imply for the future of the Coast Guard Reserve?

As Admiral Stosz mentioned, the Coast Guard is busy creating a strategic plan for the future of the Reserve, but there are still questions, such as:

Is the Reserve the right size? Should it be larger?

How frequently can we call on our Reservists and their families to sacrifice for long deployments - and at what cost?

Where and what will be the next hot spot overseas?

And we know there will be hurricanes.

We simply don't know the answer to these questions. We have only the certainty of knowing the men and women of the Coast Guard Reserve will be there to help us answer the call.

I'll close with another vignette, this one with an eye towards the future:

There will be another springtime and a place in our Nation where another disaster will unfold... perhaps with loss of life and property, and economic and environmental damage – by the hand of nature, or perhaps by the hand of those who would do us harm.

Maybe it's a super-storm, or a pandemic - or an unforeseen, accidental and catastrophic collapse of critical maritime infrastructure. We don't yet know what it will be, or when it will be, or how many will be affected.

But we are confident that when that time comes that we can depend once more on the expertise and patriotism of the Coast Guard Reserve.

We know they'll tell their families good bye, provide notice to their employers, and then report for duty.

We know they'll use their training, professionalism, and initiative to do anything and everything that needs doing...

we know they'll do it with "unflagging zeal for the job at hand."

... And we know they will shine.

Semper Paratus! ... and Happy Birthday, Coast Guard Reserve!