Profile: ADMIRAL THAD ALLEN

Commandant United States Coast Guard

By Richard H. Wagner

The Commandant of the US Coast Guard is the highest ranking member of the US Coast Guard. He is the only four-star Admiral of the Coast Guard, and is appointed for a four year term by the President of the United States upon confirmation of the United States Senate. On 25 May 2006, Admiral Thad Allen was named the 23rd Commandant of the Coast Guard. "I can think of no greater honor and no better way to continue serving our Nation than through our Coast Guard, a service whose embedded responsibilities impact every American."

"I have spent my entire life in the United States Coast Guard. I was born while my father an enlisted father, a Seaman on the deck force, was underway on a Coast Guard cutter. In 1967, I traded my dependent's ID for an active duty card when I entered the United States Coast Guard Academy. I have seen life from the junior enlisted ranks as a dependent, and I have been lucky enough to advance through the organization as an active duty officer. My Coast Guard service has ingrained in me an abiding respect for its people, their work, and the value this work provides to the Nation," Allen said during his confirmation hearing.

Indeed, Admiral Allen has had an impressive and varied Coast Guard career. He has served aboard three Coast Guard cutters, the ANDROSCOGGIN, GALLATIN and CITRUS, which he commanded His coastal command operational assignments include Captain of the Port / Group Long Island Sound, Connecticut; Group Atlantic City, New Jersey and LORAN Station Lampang, Thailand.

Among his flag assignments, Admiral Allen commanded the Seventh Coast Guard District where he directed Coast Guard operations in South Carolina, Georgia, Florida and throughout the Caribbean. served as Commander, Coast Guard Atlantic Area, Fifth Coast Guard District, and U.S. Maritime Defense Zone Atlantic in Portsmouth, Va., where he was the operational commander for all Coast Guard activities in an area of responsibility spanning five Coast Guard Districts, encompassing more than 14 million square miles and involving 26,000 military and civilian employees, and 27,900 Auxiliarists. Admiral Allen led the Coast Guard's Atlantic Area forces in response to the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001.

In May 2006, Admiral Allen was appointed the Coast Guard Chief of Staff and Commanding Officer, Coast Guard Headquarters, in Washington, D.C.. During this period, he also served as the Chairman of the Department of Homeland Security's Joint Requirements Council from 2003 to 2006. In September 2005, Admiral Allen was designated the Principal Federal Official for Hurricane Katrina response and recovery operations in Louisiana, Mississippi and Alabama. He additionally served as Principal Federal

Official for Hurricane Rita response and recovery activities in Louisiana.

Admiral Allen assumed command of the Coast Guard during one of its most critical and transformational times. Following the attacks of September 11, 2001, the demands on the Coast Guard increased substantially. Congress passed the Maritime Transportation Security Act and the International Maritime Organization promulgated the International Ship and Port Security Code setting forth new security requirements to be enforced by the Coast Guard. In addition, Coast Guard personnel and assets found themselves thousands of miles from home, patrolling off Iraq and providing law enforcement capability on Navy ships interdicting terrorist and drug traffic off of Africa and in the Persian Gulf.

At the same time, the Coast Guard was transferred from the Department of Transportation to the Department of Homeland Security, becoming the largest organization within that agency. This transfer was accompanied by the development of new working relationships with other federal agencies both inside and outside of the Department. Also, the Coast Guard has re-thought and modified its internal structure.

"One of the most important organizational changes the Coast Guard has pursued in its three-tiered prevention and response structure has been the creation of Sectors," Admiral Allen has noted. "First envisioned in 2004, the Sector concept was adopted to consolidate the Coast Guard's operational resources and missions under a single command umbrella for a particular portion of the United States," Allen explains. "This consolidation will provide a single point of accountability for operations. It will also unify resource allocation and enable risk based decision making tools to focus on Coast Guard capabilities and competencies to reduce risk and mitigate threats."

To help deal with the increase in the Coast Guard's responsibilities, the force has grown. Since 2001, Coast Guard strength has risen 15 percent, an increase of 6,200 uniformed and civilian personnel. At his confirmation hearing, Admiral Allen stated: "The challenge I accept is to continue to provide Coast Guard personnel, the skills, knowledge and competencies needed to effectively contribute to mission execution and at the same time further individual growth, career development, and life-long learning."

"We are nothing without our people and our people cannot be effective without the right tools," Admiral Allen has often said. However, the service faces an asset crisis. The Coast Guard operates more than 250 ships in addition to some 1,400 small boats but it is one of the oldest fleets in the world. The average age of a Coast Guard cutter is more than 35 years. In recent testimony before Congress, Admiral Allen pointed out: "Some of our cutters are old enough to be eligible for Social Security!" Not only is much of the fleet outdated and not suited for today's demands but there is increasing downtime and maintenance costs for these obsolete ships and aircraft.

To meet this crisis, the Coast Guard embarked in 1993 on a 25-year modernization program called Project Deepwater - - "the centerpiece of the Coast Guard's future capability in nearly all of our maritime missions." Admiral

Allen has explained: "We determined that it would be most cost effective and efficient to acquire a wholly integrated system of ships, aircraft, sensors, and communications systems, or as it is commonly called a 'system of systems.' The idea is based on the concept that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts; all elements combine to generate greater capabilities across the entire system. Given that, our goal is not to replace ships, aircraft, and senors with more ships, aircraft and senors, but with the functional capabilities required to safely achieve mission success."

The Deepwater program has already resulted in improvements to the Coast Guard's asset base. During the last year, the first of the new Maritime Patrol Aircraft, the HC-144A, was delivered, a new surface ship training center was opened, command, control, and senor upgrades were made to all 39 medium and high endurance cutters, and the first of the new National Security Cutters ("NSC") was launched and christened. The service's small and medium range helicopters "are being modernized and converted to serve as more capable multimission platforms."

"Deepwater's re-engining and upgrading of our legacy fleet of 95 HH-65 helicopters offers a good example of how the Deepwater Program will benefit Coast Guard execution in all of our missions. At the end of May [2007], 37 of the more powerful HH-65C helicopters had been re-engined and returned to service with our operating forces. The operational benefits were apparent during our response to Hurricane Katrina last year. Three upgraded HH-65C helicopters flew 85 sorties to save 305 lives."

The program has, however, encountered a number of significant challenges. The Coast Guard had planned to lengthen 49 110-foot patrol boats to 123 feet in an effort to make those ships suffice until new cutters can be deployed. However, the first eight boast that were converted developed hull problems and Admiral Allen was forced to cancel the project. One of the ways the Coast Guard had considered for replacing the planned 123 foot boats was to bring forward the schedule for delivery of the Fast Response Cutter ("FRC"). But, the design for the FRC called for the hull to be built of a composite material and testing revealed that the material was inadequate for the job, significantly setting back that program. Along the same lines, testing revealed that the NSC would not have the lifespan that that program called for because of fatigue brought on by the stresses that result from constant patrolling in all types of weather. Finally, in order to have the capabilities needed to meet the increased demands placed upon the Coast Guard after September 11, 2001, the estimated cost of Deepwater has grown from $17 billion to $24 billion over 25 years.

The aforementioned problems with Deepwater had their genesis before Admiral Allen took command. However, he is the one that has had to deal with the criticism in the media and elsewhere, revamp the Coast Guard's acquisition program, and make the choices needed to compensate for these setbacks. "We are on the path to change and we will not stop until the Coast Guard has the tools it needs to protect America. I am the Commandant of the Coast Guard. I am responsible, I will do this right."