



Delivering the Goods

News from the U.S. Coast Guard Acquisition Directorate

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'Stay the course': Rear Adm. Rábago Lays out the 'Track Lines' as Assistant Commandant for Acquisition

By Hunter Keeter

As the Coast Guard Acquisition Directorate approaches its third anniversary, *Delivering the Goods* had the opportunity to sit down with Rear Adm. Ronald J. Rábago to get his perspective on acquisition reform, modernization and the business of recapitalizing the Coast Guard.

Rábago is a naval engineer who has worked in the acquisition community since January 2007, when the Commandant detailed him as Program Executive Officer (PEO) for Deepwater. He then transitioned to be the PEO and Director of Acquisition Programs in the newly created Acquisition Directorate.

Coming from an engineering and program management background, where direct interface with industry and with stakeholders was the order of the day, Rábago brings a wealth of experience in complex problem solving to his new role as Assistant Commandant for Acquisition.

He told *Delivering the Goods* that his vision for the directorate included "no dramatic course changes" as he takes over the reins from Rear Adm. Gary T. Blore. Rábago would instead "build on the work that has been done before," emphasizing the importance of people to the organization's success and the need to institutionalize lessons learned to strengthen and continue to improve the Coast Guard's acquisition business processes.

Delivering the Goods: Admiral, change is a key concept for Coast Guard modernization in general and also for the process of acquisition



On June 17th, Coast Guard Commandant Admiral Thad W. Allen presented Rear Adm. Ronald J. Rábago with his second star. Rábago is the Assistant Commandant for Acquisition, charged with managing the service's \$27 billion materiel modernization investment portfolio, which includes more than 20 major projects. *U.S. Coast Guard photo*

reform. How has the Acquisition Directorate embraced this concept?

Rear Adm. Rábago: The Acquisition Directorate (CG-9) certainly was created out of necessity. By merging the Deepwater (G-D) organization and the legacy Acquisition Directorate (G-A), we have combined the two such that CG-9 is now greater than the sum of the parts.

DTG: Since the consolidation of G-D with G-A, how has the business culture in the Acquisition Directorate evolved?

Rábago: We have created a robust, process-driven and accountable acquisition organization. Now I want to build on that and move from acqui-

sition reform to [a model of] continuous improvement. The Commandant directed that the Coast Guard needed to be more integrated before we could take on the task of managing complex acquisitions like Deepwater and recapitalize the Coast Guard. Collectively, I believe we have answered that order.

DTG: Developing and integrating well-defined policies and processes

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was a key feature of the reform effort that began with the creation of the Acquisition Directorate in July 2007. Is that still an important focus?

Rábago: That is what all of us have been working on – improving our processes and practices and integrating them across the Coast Guard. Standardizing processes isn't just a job for the Director of Acquisition Programs. We depend on other offices within acquisition, including the Head of Contracting Activity and the Director of Acquisition Services, as well as the technical authorities, sponsor, resource provider, our department and, most importantly, the Coast Guard's operating forces, to make sure that we are collectively successful in executing projects within the acquisition enterprise. This really is a Coast Guard-wide effort.

DTG: The Commandant has emphasized the need to develop additional "bench strength" in the Coast Guard's acquisition workforce. What is your assessment of the biggest challenge facing the acquisition workforce today?

Rábago: We have great people in the Acquisition Directorate and in the other stakeholder organizations. Given adequate resources and time, our

people have demonstrated their ability to do great things. All leaders face the problems of insufficient resources in terms of personnel and money. With an organization of this complexity, working through the process of integrating and prioritizing all the work, given that we don't yet have enough people and dollars, remains a significant challenge.

DTG: How will you address the Commandant's call for hiring and training more acquisition professionals?

Rábago: We want the Acquisition Directorate to continue to be a place where people want to come to work because they know that they are going to be challenged and that they have an opportunity to make a difference for our Coast Guard. We are going to work through our civilian and military personnel systems, as we have in the past, to ensure that we recruit, hire and retain high quality personnel that the Coast Guard needs now and into the future.

DTG: Will the Coast Guard have to change its standards in order to attract more people into the acquisition community?

Rábago: For us to be successful, we need professional, certified members

of the team that continue to gain experience in a variety of different ways. It requires a dedicated cadre of military and civilian professionals, working closely together as a team for our acquisition enterprise to be successful. So I envision no change in the strong emphasis on certification as a critical part of our human capital strategy.

DTG: Given the resource constraints you mentioned earlier, how will the service manage the heavy workload in acquisition and the other directorates associated with Coast Guard modernization?

Rábago: One of the themes [in acquisition reform and modernization] is to have everyone in their proper role and then [coming together] as a team to accomplish the work. No Coast Guard entity is staffed to do someone else's job. Acquirers, technical authorities, sponsor, etc., all have to perform our assigned roles to have the appropriate checks and balances in place and distribute the workload efficiently. Today, that is exactly what is happening, and why we are able to make progress. I am going to continue to emphasize [the importance of] roles and responsibilities for all stakeholders so that, as a team, we are able to acquire the assets and the systems that the Coast Guard needs for success.

DTG: Within the Acquisition Directorate's projects, how are roles and responsibilities delineated?

Rábago: There is a pyramid of responsibility that we follow. At the top is the program executive officer and deputy. Then we have program managers, who oversee a particular domain, and then within the domain, we have project managers. We are beginning to find synergies between projects because they exist within a [shared] domain, and are also beginning to take advantage of common requirements when the programs interact with one another.

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The Sentinel-class patrol boat project is a good example of a complex task requiring close cooperation among all elements of the acquisition enterprise and the mission support community, writ large. As lead systems integrator for the Sentinel-class acquisition, the Coast Guard's requirements sponsor, resource provider, engineering and logistics, research and development, contracting, and acquisition management professionals must work together to be successful. *Bollinger Shipyards graphic*

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Additionally, the project and program staffs are taking full advantage of the matrixed support services of the Office of Acquisition Services and the expertise of the contracting professionals in the Office of the Head of Contract Activity, to manage and execute their projects.

DTG: The Coast Guard takes pride in the empowerment of its people. Is that part of the Acquisition Directorate's culture?

Rábago: From a management perspective, that is critical. No one can know everything about all the tasks; it is too complex and there is too much work. So it is very important that those at each level of the pyramid have the right amount of knowledge in order to make sound and timely decisions.

DTG: How important is effective internal and external communication to the success of the acquisition enterprise?

Rábago: Communication is absolutely essential [for] teaming and cross-coordination within the Acquisition Directorate. Equally important, we must be able to frequently communicate with our sponsor, resource provider and technical authorities, who are our partners in recapitalization. Anything we can do to facilitate communication and the sharing of information is incredibly important as we move forward.

DTG: Building on lessons from the last two or three years, what will be the major focus of your effort as Assistant Commandant for Acquisition?

Rábago: Our relationships are strong and collaborative, but they are not institutionalized. They are built by great people with a lot of expertise who have come through the crucible of building the new organization and are successfully working together. We now must capture the progress thus far by updating the Major Systems Acquisition Manual, the Blueprint, the Human Capital Strategy and other documents in order to document policies, practices, tasks, lessons learned, roles and responsibilities so that we can execute those activities not only today but also for those who follow us. They will have the benefit of what we have learned in order to continue making our acquisition enterprise successful. ■

Coast Guard Research and Development Center Celebrates Move to New Facility at Historic Fort Trumbull

By Linda M. Johnson

The Coast Guard's Research and Development (R&D) Center recently marked its move across the river to a brand new facility in New London, Conn., with a Ribbon-cutting Ceremony. Approximately 175 people gathered in a white tent adjacent to the gleaming new building last month to celebrate the start of a fresh chapter in the R&D Center's 41-year history. It is fitting that the R&D Center's new offices are located at Fort Trumbull, a place where service members have helped defend American shores since the Revolutionary War and the original site of the first Coast Guard Academy from 1915 to 1932.

The 42,000 square-foot facility is also home to the Coast Guard's International Ice Patrol, which promotes safe navigation when the danger of iceberg collisions exists,



Left to right: GSA Administrator Glenn C. Rotondo, R&D Center Commanding Officer Capt. Matthew J. Sisson, New London Mayor Rev. Wade A. Hyslop Jr., former Assistant Commandant for Acquisition Rear Adm. Gary T. Blore, Coast Guard Museum President Jerry L. Ostermiller, Dr. Wayne Gronlend with the Marine Safety Laboratory and Cmdr. Scott Rogerson with the International Ice Patrol clutch their gold scissors after cutting the ribbon at the gleaming new R&D Center facility in New London, Conn.

U.S. Coast Guard photo by PA3 Timothy Tamargo

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and the Coast Guard's Marine Safety Laboratory, which provides forensic oil analysis and expert testimony in support of oil pollution law enforcement efforts. The R&D Center, International Ice Patrol and Marine Safety Laboratory were previously co-located across the Thames River at the Coast Guard Communications School at the University of Connecticut's Avery Point campus, also in New London.

On hand to speak at the ceremony and officially dedicate the building were the Commanding Officer of the R&D Center Capt. Matthew J. Sisson; former Assistant Commandant for Acquisition Rear Adm. Gary T. Blore; City of New London Mayor Rev. Wade A. Hyslop, Jr.; National Coast Guard Museum President Jerry L. Ostermiller; and General Services Administration Acting Regional Administrator for New England Glenn C. Rotondo.

Capt. Sisson, who served as the event's emcee, opened the Ribbon-cutting Ceremony. "Today we are inaugurating a new facility to keep pace with our growing role in the Coast Guard of today and tomorrow... The R&D Center is a wonderful place to work. It is a repository of Coast Guard knowledge and technical expertise. And, while we hang our hats here, our work is largely in the field, partnering with Coast Guard units who, despite their tremendous operational tempo, find the time to give us their expertise and energy to field test, revise and improve our tools," Sisson said.

He thanked "the aircrews who endured many hours in full-body weapons of mass destruction response suits to test how long they could execute Coast Guard missions wearing this gear; the gunners who exhaus-

tively tested the responsiveness and accuracy of our standard mounted automatic weapon, the M240 machine gun; the small boat crews who tested and deployed a developmental underwater imaging device that can see objects below the surface in zero visibility; and the flight deck crews of the National Security Cutter Bertholf who gave their valuable input on how to hangar, traverse, launch and rescue unmanned aerial vehicles. These invaluable partnerships help us in our mission – our sole mission – to make the Coast Guard more effective."

41 Years of R&D

Rear Adm. Blore, the keynote speaker, remarked, "Whether it is in the execution of our missions in maritime security, maritime safety or national defense, the Coast Guard recognizes the importance of assessing and capturing emerging technologies and adapting these to real mission needs. It is fitting that this year we mark the 41st anniversary of the formalizing of the Coast Guard's R&D program. This unit has influenced the service's engineering, acquisition and operational communities ever since."

Blore noted that the R&D Center has received numerous citations and awards for outstanding ingenuity and achievements in the advancement of technology that significantly improves Coast Guard mission execution. At any given time, the R&D Center's 110 staff members – approximately 80 civilians and 30 military personnel – are working on more than 80 projects supporting not just Coast Guard acquisition but field operations as well.

"I couldn't be prouder of the new synergies that have developed since R&D became integrated within

our acquisition enterprise – their dedication in providing world-class analysis and engineering services allow us to deliver tailored, state-of-the-market products to our operating forces. Their work helps the Coast Guard in general – and the acquisition and engineering communities in particular – to ensure that our men and women have the best possible tools with which to do their jobs more safely, effectively and efficiently," Blore said.

"The R&D Center has always been, and will always be, a repository of knowledge where the Coast Guard can count on getting honest analysis and insightful recommendations at a tremendous value to the taxpayer – even more so now with this new facility," Blore explained. "It includes a wide breadth of activities, from computer modeling and simulation, air-launched boat entanglement devices, the use of portable biometrics devices at sea, the latest in unmanned aerial system technologies, continuing analysis on oil spill recovery techniques and ballast water initiatives, to satellite applications of automatic identification systems – truly an inspiring array of work products that make the Coast Guard more effective."

Blore concluded, "Having worked closely with the R&D Center for the last three years, it is not an exaggeration to say that without R&D Center efforts, we would not have been able to develop key critical technologies. And, by involving the R&D Center early in our acquisition efforts, we have avoided millions of dollars in costs. As a consequence, I only see great things ahead for this unit, this new facility and this community."■