

U. S. Department of
Homeland Security

United States
Coast Guard



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DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY

U. S. COAST GUARD

WRITTEN TESTIMONY OF

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ON THE

**COAST GUARD RESERVES:
RECRUITMENT, RETENTION, AND END STRENGTH**

BEFORE THE

HOUSE ARMED SERVICES COMMITTEE

SUBCOMMITTEE ON MILITARY PERSONNEL

MARCH 3, 2009

Good afternoon, Chairwoman Davis, Congressman Wilson and distinguished members of the House Armed Service Subcommittee. It is a pleasure to have this opportunity to appear before you today to discuss the Coast Guard Reserve, its contribution to National Defense and Homeland Security, the issues that face the men and women of our Coast Guard Reserve and the Coast Guard's ability to sustain the high level of quality staffing we currently have.

As you know, as one of the five Armed Forces of the United States, the Coast Guard has a long and distinguished history of service at home and abroad as a military, maritime, multi-mission service always ready for all threats and all hazards. Because of its mix of military and civil law enforcement authorities, the Coast Guard is uniquely positioned to serve as the Lead Federal Agency for Maritime Homeland Security while acting as a supporting agency to the Department of Defense (DoD) for National Defense. Founded in 1941, the Coast Guard Reserve is the force multiplier for the operational Coast Guard, due in part to the complete integration of our Selected Reserve Force into active component units during the last decade. In fact, over 85 percent of our 8,100-member Selected Reserve Force is directly assigned to active Coast Guard shore units, where Reservists hone readiness skills through classroom instruction and on-the-job training side-by-side with their Active Duty counterparts. The remainder of our Selected Reserve Force is dedicated primarily to supporting Defense Operations. The majority of these reservists are assigned to our eight deployable Port Security Units (PSUs) which are staffed by Reservists and Full Time Support personnel; the PSU's principal mission is to support the Combatant Commanders in strategic ports of debarkation overseas. The remaining personnel are assigned to DoD units, such as the Maritime Expeditionary Security Squadrons and Combatant Commanders' staffs.

INTEGRATION:

The strength the Coast Guard gained through integration in the 1990s was the creation of this Operational Reserve Force. Although just less than one-fourth the size of the Active Duty component at approximately 8,100 personnel, this operational reserve force acts as a surge capability ready and able to respond to any national or domestic contingency. They responded magnificently to the attacks of September 2001, and all contingency operations that have followed. Since 2001, cumulative recalls of Coast Guard Reservists under Title 10 of the U.S. Code have totaled over 6,800, with Reservists serving at home as part of the Coast Guard's Maritime Homeland Security mission and overseas in direct support of the Combatant Commanders. The majority of those recalled served domestically as members of Coast Guard units safeguarding ports and waterways alongside 95,000 miles of U.S. coastline or enforcing security zones in strategic outload ports on the Atlantic, Pacific and Gulf Coasts where supplies and equipment for combat forces begin their journey overseas. Coast Guard Reservists have also served overseas since September 2001 as members of PSUs operating in Iraq, Kuwait and Bahrain and as individuals supporting Coast Guard units in the region, including cutters under U.S. Fifth Fleet. At the height of IRAQI FREEDOM combat operations in early 2003, about half the approximately 1,250 Coast Guard personnel deployed overseas were Reservists.

POST 9/11:

Since September 2001, when we embarked on the largest mobilization of Coast Guard Reservists since World War II, we have redoubled our efforts to capture and capitalize on those lessons learned to further improve readiness and ensure a Reserve Force with the right people, skills, and training for the missions of the 21st century. We have examined our systems for recruiting, training, mobilizing, and demobilizing Reservists to identify and close readiness gaps. More significantly, we undertook a comprehensive review of the Coast Guard Reserve

that resulted in our Commandant, Admiral Thad Allen, issuing a Policy Statement that embodies the three core strategic functions of the Reserve Force: *Maritime Homeland Security*, *Domestic and expeditionary support to National Defense*, and *Domestic man-made or natural disaster response and recovery*. The individual competencies required to support these core functions center on boat operations, contingency planning and response, expeditionary warfare, law enforcement, marine safety, and port security with appropriate force levels invested in the administrative and logistical support our Reserve Force requires.

TITLE 14:

None of this represents a radical change for the Coast Guard Reserve, but rather an affirmation of the vital role our Reservists play as the Coast Guard's operational surge force. One key component of that ready surge force is availability and accessibility of individuals for mobilization. As with members of the other Reserve Components, our reserve men and women are subject to involuntary mobilization under Title 10 for national security contingencies. However, unlike members of the other Reserve Components, Coast Guard Reservists can also be involuntarily mobilized by the Secretary of Homeland Security under 14 USC 712 for up to 60 days at a time for domestic contingencies, including natural and man-made disasters and terrorist attacks. This unique authority provided under Title 14 has been used over a dozen times since the 1970s to mobilize Coast Guard Reservists for a wide range of emergencies ranging from the 1980 Mariel Boat Lift to floods, hurricanes and other natural disasters.

In 2005, it was this special authority used by the Secretary of Homeland Security, that allowed the Coast Guard to mobilize approximately 700 members of the Coast Guard Reserve for Hurricanes Katrina and Rita, providing a ready force for rescue and recovery operations in New Orleans and the stricken areas of the Gulf Coast. It was used again this past year for nearly 70 members in response to Hurricanes Gustav and Ike. In all, members of the Coast Guard Reserve mobilized under Title 14 for Hurricanes Katrina and Rita performed nearly 20,000 person-days of duty in support of Coast Guard rescue and recovery operations. Most served alongside their active-duty counterparts as individual augmentees. For instance, several Reservists assigned as Coast Guard Investigative Service special agents were mobilized to augment active-duty and civilian agents deployed to New Orleans, Baton Rouge, and Gulfport, where they provided armed security for senior officials and personnel disbursing cash to Coast Guard members. In addition to individual augmentees, the Coast Guard also activated two PSUs to provide physical security in New Orleans and Gulfport, and to aid in the distribution of relief supplies, a departure from their normal mission of deploying overseas in support of Defense Operations but a testament to the ability of our Reservists to mobilize when and where needed to plus-up Coast Guard forces responding to an emergency.

Recent legislative changes have also provided an increased capability of our Coast Guard Reserve. The Coast Guard and Maritime Transportation Act of 2006 expanded the Secretary of Homeland Security's Title 14 recall authority to permit mobilization of Coast Guard Reservists "to aid in prevention of an imminent serious natural or manmade disaster, accident, catastrophe, or act of terrorism." Other language included in the bill extended the limits on the period of recall to not more than 60 days in any four-month period and to not more than 120 days in any two-year period. This significantly enhanced our ability to mitigate major natural disasters and thwart terrorist attacks by enabling us to bring Coast Guard Reservists on active duty even before disaster strikes.

ORGANIZATION STRUCTURE:

A major component of the Coast Guard's success in responding to disasters is the Coast Guard's decentralized command and control structure. The authority and responsibility to move forces, including Reservists, establish response readiness levels, and direct operations is vested in the regional District and Area Commanders. This provides the most direct oversight of operations at the field level and avoids delays caused by unnecessary and time-consuming bureaucratic processes. However, the most important factor contributing to the Coast Guard's effectiveness in disaster response is the fact that our forces are engaged in this type of mission on a daily basis. As the nation's maritime first responder, Coast Guard men and women, Active, Reserve, Civilian, and Auxiliary plan for, train and execute missions every single day.

DOD IN DESIGN:

The Coast Guard also possesses several unique features that help to integrate its efforts with those of the DoD, other Federal agencies, the National Guard, and state and local authorities. Because the Coast Guard is at all times a branch of the military, our communications systems, planning processes, personnel training and even our command structures have much in common with the DoD Services. Coast Guard commanders can be either supported or supporting commanders for military operations, and we have extensive experience working in and with DoD Joint Task Force Headquarters. This allows for easy integration of forces and unity of effort when working together during major catastrophes. Today, our coordination with DoD is the best that it has been since World War II with numerous Active Duty and Reservists assigned at our Combatant Commands and various other DoD organizations providing key skills in support of our nation's defense.

JOINT FORCES:

The Coast Guard has excellent working relationships with all of the Armed Forces, providing support and leveraging expertise through mutual agreements. At Marine Corps Base Camp Lejeune, North Carolina, the Coast Guard partnered with the Marine Corps to develop the Coast Guard Special Mission Training Center which is tasked to provide training, doctrine, and testing/evaluation in support of mission requirements of the Coast Guard, Navy, and Marine Corps operational forces. The Special Mission Training Center offers specialized courses for Coast Guard Reserve deployable units, and inclusion of Coast Guard personnel in formal training conducted by the Navy and Marine Corps.

In today's joint environment the spirit of cooperation and common purpose is exceptionally high. The Coast Guard welcomed the opportunity last May to participate in PATRIOT HOOK when PSU 312 working jointly with the 452nd Air Lift Control Flight, leveraged the opportunity to complete required underway live fire, anti-swimmer grenade training, and rehearsal of the movement of personnel and equipment by land and air. During the four-day exercise, held at San Clemente Island, over one-half million pounds of cargo is transported by the U.S. Air Force from various airfields to San Clemente Island.

INTERAGENCY:

In addition to our work with DoD, the Coast Guard works on a daily basis with other Federal, state, and local partners. The Service's Ports, Waterways and Coastal Security mission requires the Coast Guard to interact daily with state and local law enforcement and emergency response organizations, exercising command structures and building the trust critical to effectively execute an emergency response. Coast Guard Captains of the Port provide a critical link through Local Emergency Planning Committees, Area Maritime Security Committees,

Harbor Safety Committees, Area Planning Committees, Regional Response Teams, and other venues that allow the Coast Guard to build close relationships with key partners in disaster response. Because of the integrated nature of the Coast Guard, individual Reservists play a key role in these efforts. Their dual status as Coast Guard members and residents of their local communities frequently enables them to leverage organizational and personal relationships that yield immeasurable benefits during a crisis situation.

The Coast Guard has built on these important relationships to improve our emergency response capability by actively working to implement the National Response Framework (NRF). Since 1996, the Coast Guard has trained thousands of personnel, including Reservists, on the Incident Command System, a central component of the NRF and updated its full range of contingency plans to reflect the guiding principles of the NRF. Additionally, the Coast Guard has realigned and combined operational field units to provide full integration of emergency response capabilities, and directly support staffing for Joint Field Offices, when those entities are in place.

WORKFORCE:

Staffing the Coast Guard Reserve workforce is unique to the services as Reserve and Active Duty recruiting for the Coast Guard is conducted through a single Recruiting Command. The Coast Guard Reserve supplements Recruiting Offices with Reservists on Active Duty (Temporary Active Reserve Recruiters – TARRs) under the concept that Reservists are best suited to recruit Reservists. In addition to the Reserve recruiters, the Recruiting Command has found success in the use of In Service Transfer Teams (ISTT) to ensure that all Active Duty personnel that are being released from active duty are briefed on the benefits of the Coast Guard Reserves, and offered an opportunity join and continue with their military career within the Reserves.

RETENTION

Retention in the Coast Guard Reserve in FY 2009 is at 92 percent for officers and 88 percent for enlisted personnel, up respectively from 89 percent and 87 percent in fiscal year 2007. These retention rates indicate that members see the Coast Guard Selected Reserve as an attractive option and, once they join, they want to continue serving. It has not been determined that the economy is a factor in retention as retention for the Coast Guard Reserve was high before recent economic downturns.

EMPLOYER SUPPORT OF THE GUARD AND THE RESERVE

The Coast Guard is actively engaged with Employer Support of the Guard and the Reserve (ESGR). In February 2008, five Coast Guard Commands signed a pledge of participation in recognition of ESGR's contribution to the Armed Services. Following up on that pledge, the Coast Guard Reserve actively engaged Reservists to nominate employers for the Secretary of Defense's Freedom Award resulting in a substantial increase in nominees over the previous year. ESGR, working with Coast Guard Reserve, saw a positive trend of a steady decline of cases referred to ombudsman.

IMPROVED BENEFITS:

The 2008 National Defense Authorization Act along with changes to DoD and Coast Guard policy provided improved benefits for members of the Coast Guard Reserve. New dwell time policy established a 12-month limit on mobilization improving predictability for members,

families and employees. TRICARE benefits provide for up to 90-days early access to TRICARE medical and dental care when members are notified of upcoming deployments. TRICARE Reserve Select extends insurance benefits to Reservists not on active duty. The Coast Guard initiated an annual Periodic Health Assessment that will replace the previous five year medical exams making them mandatory for all personnel, Active and Reserve.

CHALLENGES:

The Coast Guard has demonstrated its ability to prepare for and respond to a wide range of contingencies, including natural disasters and terrorist attack, while executing more routine missions, such as maritime law enforcement and search-and-rescue. To continue to meet these challenges into the future, the Coast Guard continuously examines best practices and takes steps to adapt. In 2008 the Coast Guard Reserve Program developed an initiative called the Reserve Force Readiness System (RFRS) aimed at increasing readiness of Coast Guard Reserve forces. Under RFRS, existing billets will be realigned at the operational level providing improved oversight, day to day management, and readiness of our reserve forces. This new organizational construct will also provide additional leadership opportunities for senior reserve personnel (officer & enlisted), provide increased mentorship, and training for junior personnel, and optimize the placement of Full Time Support personnel (FTS).

The Coast Guard is the nation's premier maritime law enforcement agency with broad, multi-faceted jurisdictional authority. It is on behalf of the men and women of the Coast Guard that I thank you for your continued support of the Coast Guard and the Coast Guard Reserve.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. I look forward to your questions