



U.S. Coast Guard Historian's Office

Preserving Our History For Future Generations

Robert E. Kramek

1994-1998



Admiral Robert Edward Kramek was born on 15 December 1939. After graduating from Bayside (NY) High School, he entered the US Coast Guard Academy. Graduating with honors, he received a Bachelor of Science degree in Engineering and was commissioned an Ensign in 1961. Some of his duty assignments included command of the High-Endurance Cutter USCGC *Midgett*, command of the Coast Guard Base at Governor's Island (NY), command of the 13th and 7th Coast Guard Districts, and Chief of Staff of the US Coast Guard. While 7th District Commander he served concurrently as the Regional Drug Interdiction Coordinator and the head of the Haitian Migration Task Force. Admiral Kramek also attended graduate schools at the University of Michigan,

Johns Hopkins University, and the University of Alaska. He has received Masters of Science degrees in Naval Architecture and Marine Engineering, Mechanical Engineering and Engineering Management. He attended the US Naval War College in Newport RI and graduated with high distinction. He was selected for flag rank in 1986 and completed the "Capstone" Program at the National Defense University at Fort McNair, Washington, DC. He became the 20th Commandant of the Coast Guard succeeding Admiral J. William Kime on 1 June 1994.

During his tenure the service significantly expanded its global reach and influence. His term, therefore, may be characterized as an "international" effort. Admiral Kramek, for example, directed the service's participation in Operation FRONTIER SHIELD, a combined service/international anti-narcotic smuggling operation. This effort was intended to "deny drug traffickers the ability to ship cocaine and marijuana through Puerto Rico, the Virgin Islands, and Lesser Antilles." (Kramek's own words) Operation GULF SHIELD was another such effort. He also instituted a mobile training team that assisted other countries in developing their own sea-based law enforcement agencies. The USCG also participated in law enforcement training operations such as Operation TRADEWINDS, assisting our allies throughout the Caribbean in dealing with law enforcement and search and rescue capabilities. The service also assisted and trained with South American navies and coast guards through operations, such as UNITAS, that emphasized the Coast Guard's military readiness.

The USCG participated in Operation BALTOPS in the Baltic Sea each year the operations took place. The service also assisted a number of the former Soviet republics, namely Latvia, Estonia, Lithuania, and Ukraine, in developing their own coast guards. The Coast Guard also worked closely with the Russian Border Guard (former KGB) in order to institute joint operations and agreements for organizational cooperation. These emphasized joint fisheries patrols, environmental responses, and search and rescue operations. The service also developed international training exercises, particularly with Canadian agencies, to prepare the USCG and other agencies to respond to oil spills.



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The service responded to a number of tragedies. These included the SAR operations for the downed Alas Airlines Flight 301 in February 1996 and TWA Flight 800 in July of the same year. When Cuban aircraft downed a private aircraft off Cuba, the USCG proved that the Cubans' fired upon the aircraft in international waters. The USCG also escorted the "Brothers to the Rescue" flotilla safely through their journey near Cuban territorial waters. Operation ABLE MANNER also saw the USCG rescue thousands of Haitian refugees. In addition to these important SAR missions, the USCG also responded to a number of major oil spills. The most noteworthy of these included the largest oil spill in Rhode Island's history and a 210,000-gallon spill in the Houston Ship Channel.

He successfully led the service through difficult budget battles each year and directed the "streamlining" plan that was mandated by the President Clinton's National Performance Review and "Mandate for Change." At the same time the next generation of coastal and sea-going buoy tenders began to enter the fleet, insuring the Coast Guard's aids to navigation role well into the next century. Admiral Kramek confronted the challenge of increasing and encouraging diversity by instituting a cultural audit study. He also oversaw the development of the USCG Academy as the Leadership Training Center. This merged various training programs from around the country and consolidated them at New London.