

Capt Bernard's LDC Commissioning Address on May 12, 1998



The following speech was taken from the Bulletin, CGA Alumni Association, August 1998 edition. The text of CAPT Bernard's commissioning address follows:

"Today is indeed a wonderful day for the Coast Guard and the Academy. On these 66 year old steps we are acknowledging and celebrating the beginning of a new chapter in Coast Guard history. I personally find this change to be as significant as when cadets first set sail on the Schooner Dobbins in May 1877 or when we began shore-based instruction early in this century, first in Baltimore, then down the river at Ft Trumbull, and eventually here at this beautiful location. I am honored to be a part, a small part.

In case you wonder what a Director of Leadership does, here are a few hints: "he or she will coordinate all of the leadership activities... promoting integration and seeking benefit from the (resulting) synergies. Contribute to the educational and intellectual mission of the School... serve as a visible leadership champion ..., developing and sharing leadership practices." In case you wonder where that description comes from, it came from an ad in The Chronicle for Higher Education placed by the MIT Sloan School just last week as part of their search for a new position as Director of Leadership. I don't know about you, but it gives me a little feeling of confidence and satisfaction to know that MIT is trying to do today what the Coast Guard decided several years ago to do.

One of the most important projects in the Coast Guard today is Called Deepwater, trying to design and acquire the ships and planes that will enable the Coast Guard to meet the many challenges of the 21st century. As we push forward today to create the better ships of tomorrow, I think it is important to recall the words of ADM Farragut many years ago: "Give me plenty of iron in the ships." If given the chance today, I am sure he would say men and women and I'm sure he would have added something about technology along with the iron. But the concept is the same and it was recently reinforced in the mini-series "From the Earth to the Moon:" invest all you want in ships and planes, rockets and space craft, ultimately, its people that make the difference. If we want to be the best organization, and we do, we have to have the best people.

The creation of the Leadership Development Center represents the Coast Guard's belief in this concept. Locating the center here at the Coast Guard Academy represents an acknowledgement that leadership development is inexorably linked to personal intellectual growth. Nowhere in the Coast Guard are the resources more available to assist with that growth and development than here at the Academy with our faculty, our library, and our many other assets that already combine to bring about 140 new Ensigns into the Coast Guard each year and in the future will combine to bring over 300 new Ensigns, 500 new Chief Petty Officers, 150 new Chief Warrant Officers, and a host of other graduates at unique points in their careers.

There have been many people involved in this project in a variety of different ways for varying lengths of time. I just joined the team a few months ago and cannot take credit for the great work they have done, some of which is visible today, but much of which is buried in organizational plans and policies created to ensure the successful integration and operation of the LDC here at the Academy. The charge was monumental, some might even say impossible. "Consolidate the different courses and schools here to create a LDC fully integrated into the Academy creating synergy with all leadership efforts connected together with the ability to combine the strengths of each of the programs for the mutual benefit of all of them while protecting the unique identity, culture, and traditions of each one."

You probably don't want to sit here while I describe how we managed to consolidate, integrate, and yet, keep separate these different programs, so I won't. But I will tell you how I see the result. IT is like many craftsmen putting together a vessel made of the finest wood. They had meetings, discussed and developed plans, selected materials, measured twice, cut once, sanded smooth, and placed all the pieces together according to the agreed upon design. Today we launch it. And any sailor in the crowd will tell you what happens when you launch a wooden boat for the first time, or after it has been out of the water for a while. It sinks! Well, it doesn't completely sink, hopefully, but it does take on water. But after a short period something magical happens. The wood begins to absorb some of the water and expand. Initial gaps or openings between the planks are slowly closed and the water flow is reduced to a trickle. With minimal of caulking and maybe none at all, the vessel is not only seaworthy but a wonder to behold.

This is how I see the project today and how I predict it will go from today on. Many skilled craftsmen and women have poured their heart and soul into this project. It will probably take on some water, but it will not only float, it will sail wonderfully on as a symbol of a critical and highly successful turning point in the Coast Guard Academy and the Coast Guard. It want to thank ADM Kramek especially for making this project a reality and RADM Teeson for bringing me here last summer so I could become a part of this important historical event.

Since I arrived here last fall, our theme to the Commandant and other distinguished visitors has been "On Target and Tracking." This was an important theme that served us well, enabling the Commandant and many others to feel comfortable that there was nothing to prevent us from opening on schedule today (except of course mother nature). While that theme has served us well, it has also served its purpose. In today's environment and certainty in the environment of the new century that approached, heading in the right direction towards a defined goal is simply not good enough.

Military leaders of the past had to achieve specified outcomes in the most efficient manner possible. Military leaders of the future must also be able to help define what those outcomes should look like and what measures of effectiveness exist to help us determine the efficiency to which we achieve them. Our ability to recruit, retain, and develop our workforce will be evaluated side by side with our ability to accomplish assigned missions. To the leadership and general membership of Team Coast Guard, I pledge that the LDC as part of the new Coast Guard Academy will not be satisfied with simply moving in the right direction. We will do everything possible to determine what that direction is; we will constantly look for opportunities to accelerate out pace and leap forward with new innovations of technology and quality management; and we will provide continuous improved benefit to our individuals, our units, and our organization in ways that will set us apart from other organizations, public, and private.

Many people, and I am one, refer to the Coast Guard as the premier Maritime Agency in the world. I don't know who's second, and don't much care. Because here in New London, this LDC is part of this new Coast Guard Academy will not be looking back, but ahead. Thanks to the vision that ADM Kramek has provided and the Leadership RADM Teeson will continue to provide, I have no doubt that the Coast Guard will not only continue at the top, but put distance between us and whoever's back there. Thank-you very much!"