

U.S. Coast Guard Port Security Unit History

Early Roots

The roots of the Coast Guard's deployable port security mission are traced back to World War I and World War II and the traditional CONUS port safety and security duties of the Captain of the Port (COTP). During World War II, some overseas COTP-type operations were carried out by the Coast Guard in both the Pacific and European Theaters. Experiences in Vietnam demonstrated that a need for Coast Guard port security capabilities in overseas ports continued to exist.

During the early 1980's, DoD planners formally identified the need for port security forces in OCONUS seaports of debarkation. Dialogue began between the Army, Navy, and Coast Guard, and the concept of the deployable Port Security Unit (PSU) was born. In January 1985 the Commandant approved three notional PSUs to respond to the requirements of DoD operations plans. The three units were located in the Ninth Coast Guard District at Buffalo, NY, Cleveland, OH, and Milwaukee, WI.

Mission Defined

PSUs are organized, equipped, and trained to operate in joint security areas, specifically in accessible (ice-free) harbors and port areas worldwide in support of regional Combatant Commanders' requirements, and in company with DoD for national defense regional contingencies. PSUs provide 24-hour operations under all environmental conditions within the limits of equipment and personnel. PSUs normally protect vessels in transit, at the pier/port complex, or along the waterfront facility. Harbor defense and

port security operations are frequently characterized by confined and traffic-congested water and air space.

Notional Mission Assessment

In the years between the approval of the three notional PSUs and their first deployment in 1990, the PSUs suffered from inconsistent budgetary, programmatic, and training support. Personnel assigned to the units augmented small boat stations, groups, and marine safety offices during monthly drills. The PSUs borrowed boats from local units for training and exercises. Their only opportunities to train as a unit came during their two weeks of annual training. Even then, the PSUs assembled as a unit just two out of three years since unit members were still required to perform non-PSU duties.

In 1986, 311 Ninth District Coast Guardsmen, both active duty and reserve, attended Marine Corps combat skills training at Quantico, VA. In 1987, \$5 million of the Navy and Coast Guard budget was made available for the purchase of PSU equipment which included 22' Boston Whaler Transportable Port Security Boat's (TPSBs). In the late 1980's, various PSU force elements took part in several CONUS and OCONUS exercises, including deployments to Central America and the Middle East.

Operation DESERT SHIELD/DESERT STORM

During the late summer and fall of 1990, the PSUs made their first operational deployment in support of OPERATION DESERT SHIELD/DESERT STORM. PSU 301 operated in Al Jubayl, Saudi Arabia, PSU 302 in Manama, Bahrain, and PSU 303 in Ad Damman, Saudi Arabia.

In preparation for a lengthy Middle East deployment, the PSU Training Detachment (TRADET) was established at Camp Blanding, FL to train replacement units. Three units were trained by the PSU TRADET during the winter of 1991. Two were deployed to Saudi Arabia in relief of PSU 301 and PSU 303. Shortly before 301 and 303 were rotated, PSU 302 redeployed to the U.S. when it was determined that port security forces were no longer needed in Bahrain.

The buildup of personnel and equipment required to support the largest U.S. expeditionary force since World War II was tremendous. Providing secure seaports of debarkation was critical to the success of U.S. and allied forces. The units performed their port security mission admirably despite the logistical and administrative obstacles attendant to the initial deployment of new units.

Transitions and Missions of the 1990s

After returning from the Middle East, the PSUs resumed their notional status. They only trained or exercised as a unit during their two weeks of annual training. Initiatives at both the Headquarters and District level in 1993 and 1994 led to the recommendation that PSUs become dedicated drilling units. It was also recommended that two of the PSUs move to the Fifth and Eleventh Coast Guard Districts. Simultaneously, formal, skills-based PSU training was being developed for the first time. Before these initiatives could be completed, PSUs were deployed again. This time to support OPERATION UPHOLD DEMOCRACY in Haiti.

In September 1994, DOD requested PSU support for operations in Haiti. PSU 301 and PSU 302 were provided pre-deployment training at Camp Perry, Ohio. Later that month they were deployed to Cap-Haitien and Port-au-Prince, Haiti, respectively. This time the units went into action with one third active duty personnel, taking the PSU mission into the active duty community. Deploying as components of the U.S. Navy Harbor Defense Command, the PSUs provided waterside security for military sea-lift and humanitarian relief vessels. After successfully completing their mission in the challenging conditions of a third world nation, the units were brought home in late October and November, 1994. PSUs were further used for the security of waterside venues in Coastal Georgia during the 1996 Atlanta Olympics.

September 11, 2001 and Global War or Terror

The largest Reserve recall since World War II occurred in the wake of the 9/11 terrorist attacks on the United States. By the end of September 2001, over half of the reserve workforce was on active duty. On September 14, 2001, PSU 305 was immediately mobilized to New York and established and enforced security perimeters at Activities (Sector) New York, Station New York and the Coast Guard mooring and ANT Team in Bayonne, NJ. PSU 305 worked closely with other Federal, state and local law enforcement to provide security for critical Coast Guard facilities for 45 days.

PSU 305 returned to Ft. Eustis only to be immediately redeployed in support of Joint Task Force 160 at the newly established detention center at Naval Station Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, known originally as Camp X-Ray. PSU 305 responsibilities included providing a visible deterrent in the Naval Defensive Sea Area (NDSA)

surrounding the Naval Station and providing shore side security personnel to man entry control points to Camp X-Ray and the Fleet Hospital where combative enemy detainees were receiving medical treatment. Working closely with our joint service partners in JTF 160, PSU 305 played an integral role in establishing a robust, layered defense around the Naval Station and the detainee areas until more permanent security measures could be implemented.

In subsequent years, JTF 160 was replaced by Joint Task Force Guantanamo (JTF GTMO) and the Maritime Safety and Security Teams (MSSTs) periodically replaced the Port Security Units in Guantanamo Bay when the PSU's were called upon to support security operations for US Central Command (CENTCOM).

Support to the Warfighter

In 2002, as part of OPERATION IRAQI FREEDOM (OIF), PSUs deployed to CENTCOM as part of USN TF-51 to secure critical infrastructure in the AOR. During OIF, the Coast Guard performed many vital functions, including in-shore patrol, maritime interdiction, and port security. The PSUs performed their port security duties efficiently despite the fact that their units served in three separate port facilities and two oil terminals.

During the initial stages of support, PSU 313 was assigned to a Task Force that secured offshore oil platforms and ensured the security of these facilities for Coalition partners. PSU 309 had spent the month of March in Italy waiting for the start of naval operations in support of Iraq's northern front. Personnel lined up logistics and command and control functions and prepared for operations in other parts of the Mediterranean.

PSU 309 provided force protection for the PATFORMED WPBs and U.S. Navy supply ships docked at Augusta Bay, Sicily, and most unit members received four to five hours of training per day. Early in April, the command staff received word that PSU 309 would be released and speculation grew that the unit would be rotated back home.

In total three PSUs served in the North Arabian Gulf during OIF. One transferred to the Gulf after its original mission failed to materialize. The other two PSUs initially provided security on the two Iraqi GOPLATS in the northern Arabian Gulf after Navy SEALS and Marines secured these two vital facilities. The GOPLATS were vital to the post-war Iraqi economy and seen as a possible source of oil release into the Arabian Gulf as well as a possible base of operations for small boats.

Under the follow-on Operation ENDURING FREEDOM mission, the PSUs served with distinction providing maritime security for the military and commercial ports of Kuwait until 2012 when they were released from the CENTCOM mission. These were the main ports of entry and embarkation for Allied forces during OIF. Once Allied forces occupied southern Iraq, another PSU was sent to Uum Qasr to provide security in that port.

Most recently, the PSUs have been supporting operations at Naval Station Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, providing waterside and shoreside security.

Support to the Homeland

In Sept of 2005, PSU 309 was mobilized several days after Hurricane Katrina struck the Gulf Coast. Within 96 hours of notice, the unit moved 50 tons of gear and 107 unit members 1,000 miles from Port Clinton, OH south to Gulfport, MS. Coast Guard

Station Gulfport had been totally demolished in the storm and the Mississippi coastline was left vulnerable in the absence of a Coast Guard presence capable of responding. PSU 309 set up a self sustaining tent city on an open patch of ground the size of a football field at the Navy Seabee base in Gulfport.

The unit reported to an Incident Command Post set up in Harrison County, MS along with other local, State and military units. With the assistance of an embedded SAR advisor, PSU 309 assumed full SAR responsibilities for Station Gulfport allowing their crew to focus on the safety of their families and restoration of their homes in the aftermath of the storm.

A notable accomplishment of PSU 309 included their assistance to a dozen stranded shrimp boats near Gulfport that had ridden out the storm with loss of life in the Back Bay area. PSU shoreside security personnel also assisted local homeowners with debris removal and handed out clean drinking water. The unit spent three weeks performing these critical security and assistance missions in support of the overall response efforts to Hurricane Katrina before returning to Port Clinton to demobilize.

Effects of Modernization in both the Coast Guard and Navy

The USN reorganized its Expeditionary Warfare capabilities into a new organization to better align Combatant Commanders needs. In 2006, the Navy Expeditionary Combat Command was created to meet these emerging needs. The PSUs were, and continue to be a critical component of the Coastal Riverine Force (CRF). As a forward deployed entity, the Coastal Riverine Force operates in harbors, rivers, bays, across the littorals and ashore.

The primary mission of CRF is to conduct maritime security operations across all phases of military operations by defending high value assets, critical maritime infrastructure, ports and harbors both inland and on coastal waterways against enemies and when commanded conduct offensive combat operations.

The Deployable Operations Group was established in 2007, to organize, equip and train the Deployable Specialized Forces to include the eight PSUs, ten MSSTs, two Tactical Law Enforcement Teams, the Maritime Security Response Team and the National Strike Force. Combining these units under one command enabled effective and efficient management of forces whose missions were mobile or expeditionary in nature and whose capabilities could be combined to create a multi-dimensional force package to serve operational commanders. Program management of the PSUs shifted from the two Area Commanders to the Commander, Deployable Operations Group (DOG).

PSUs circa 2011

In February 2011 the Commandant directed the Deputy Commandant for Operations to charter a Flag-Led, DSF Stem-to-Stern review working group. The charter was founded on the Commandant's DSF Vision Statement which stated "The Coast Guards rapidly deployable specialized forces will provide an array of mission specific capabilities that leverage the Coast Guard's unique authorities to support the emergent needs of operational commanders. They will also support operational commanders in planned mission sets, such as Ports, Waterways and Coastal Security. The shipmates providing this capability shall be properly trained, equipped and supported to respond

proficiently and professionally to the complex and challenging maritime threats they may face.”

Through the efforts of over ninety subject matter experts, and in a very short period of time, the Stem-to-Stern Work Group recommended the disestablishment of the DOG and transfer of its responsibilities into the broader Coast Guard organizational structure. This included transferring responsibility for doctrine and training to the Coast Guard Force Readiness Command, and logistical support for the PSU’s to the Director of Operational Logistics. In April 2013, operational control of all PSUs shifted to Commander, Pacific Area.