

U.S. Coast Guard Port Security Unit (PSU) History

By Captain John R. Olson, USCGR (ret)

Editor's comments: The first mobilization of Coast Guard Reservists since World War II occurred thirty years ago this summer when Reserve-manned Coast Guard Port Security Units (PSU) were mobilized in September 1990 to support Operation Desert Shield and later Desert Storm. There existed three concept PSUs in those early days of the PSU program and it has been a long road since they were first proposed in 1982 to that of today's PSU program with units.

Before his retirement in 2014, RADM Steven E. Day, USCGR (ret), (CGCVA LM) regularly visited and addressed PSUs preparing for deployment out of the continental United States (OCONUS) to conduct port security operations in overseas ports and harbors. During these events, it was common for RADM Day to commend the outstanding professional readiness of the officers and enlisted personnel and the state of their equipment. For RADM Day, this was a personal reflection and perspective on years of dedicated growth and development by the U.S. Coast Guard port security program from its inception in 1981 to the present.

RADM Day recalled the first-ever overseas deployment of a PSU to Saudi Arabia for Operation Desert Shield and later Desert Storm. As a lieutenant in 1990, RADM Day served as Operations Officer for PSU-303 of Milwaukee, WI. PSU-303 had responsibility for port security operations at the Persian Gulf industrial port of Ad Dammam, Saudi Arabia. PSUs brought the necessary equipment needed for repairing the boats and weapon systems, but the logistics for acquiring food, water and other supplies were to be provided by other military services on-site. In addition, command and control was implemented through a joint military organization that was often cumbersome and confusing. PSU harbor and

anchorage patrols were conducted in 22-foot Boston Whalers that were designed for port security operations and equipped with mounted automatic weapons. Pier and entry-gate patrols were staffed by the PSU's maritime security teams.

By late September, PSU-303 was joined by PSU -301 of Buffalo, NY, which was assigned to the Saudi Arabian port of Al-Jubail that was located further north on the Persian Gulf. Both units had been trained in boat tactics and security patrol methods at various maritime law enforcement schools at the USCG Training Center Yorktown. While in the Persian Gulf Area of Operations (AOR), both units modified underway boat tactics and operating procedures within each port to reflect the war-time conditions that existed. PSU-302 of Cleveland, OH, would later adopt these same procedures upon their arrival in theater in late November 1990.



**CGD9 PSU flash
worn by PSU
301, 302 and 303
from 1986-1995**

By January 1991, security operations in all three ports had become more efficient and effective. Operational changes were recorded and suggested as formal protocol for the training of relief PSUs, which began in early January 1991.

In 1991, Coast Guard Reservists who volunteered for a second-wave deployment were trained at the Florida National Guard Base, Camp Blanding, located in Clay County, Florida. These volunteers were provided with operational strategies and tactics drawn directly from the experiences of the PSUs recently deployed for Operation Desert Shield.

In commemorating the 30th anniversary of the first-ever mobilization and deployment of the PSUs for a combat-related scenario, it is important to

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provide an overview of the research and operational trails and training that led to the development of rapid-deployment Port Security Units by the U.S. Coast Guard. As a result of strategic and tactical experimentation during the late 1980s and early 1990s, the role and importance of the PSUs were defined and subsequently affirmed with their commissioning as Coast Guard Reserve commands. Because PSUs are characterized as “rapid deployment” units, it became vital to develop and support a prescribed course of study and a rigorous qualification system to ensure mobilization readiness. Today, that training protocol is recognized as an approved qualification system for port security and harbor defense operations.



THE PSU MISSION

Beginning in 1982, the U.S. Coast Guard assigned responsibility to Commander, Ninth Coast Guard District, Cleveland, OH, to begin training Reservists for military mobilization possibilities. Potential scenarios included rapid deployment missions to OCONUS ports and harbors proximate to joint-military combat zones. The intended mission of these “notional” or prototype units was to conduct port security and harbor defense operations in logistical off-load ports, referred to as the Seaport of Debarkation/Embarkation (SPOD/E), to support war-fighting efforts. In theoretical concept, high speed Coast Guard patrol craft would be assigned to maintain security zones at anchorages, in the seaway approaches and alongside ships offloading military cargoes while Coast Guard security teams would man control port and pier access points and

conduct landside security patrols.

ROLE CLARIFICATION

Before 1983, Coast Guard Reservists provided supervisory Fuel Transfer Teams and Explosive Loading Teams during operational Field Training Exercises (FTX). During (FTX) Operation Lifeline 1983, it was clear that other military services could provide fuel transfer and explosive loading supervision. An important After Action Report (AAR) was submitted to Coast Guard Commandant (M) by Captain (then LT) Daniel Zedan, USCGR (ret). The potential mobilization recommendations and DoD port security requirements identified by the AAR caused Coast Guard flag-level decision-makers to move the port security training assignment from Chicago to Cleveland. This move was made to avoid placing excessive mobilization demands on Western Great Lakes reserve units. At the time, LT Zedan also urged the creation of stand-alone Coast Guard Port Security Units, with defined personnel complements, supply inventories and patrol craft(s).

SLOW GROWTH IN SKILLS AND COMPETENCIES

Initially, Coast Guard Reservists served as observers, instructors and inter-service force elements in early trials of joint military harbor defense operations. Through the mid-1980s, port security training at Reserve Units took on greater substance and depth, with classroom training and demonstrations by U.S. Army Military Police, U.S. Air Force Security Forces and U.S. Marine Corps security specialists and combat trainers.

Boat crew personnel were sent to the small boat Law Enforcement School at the Coast Guard Training Center, Yorktown, VA. At the same time, Reservists assigned to marine safety were training in a wide array of combat skills, including weapons and operational tactics designed to enhance the security of Coast Guard and other military assets

within a port or facility. In the early 1980s, reserve units with prototype PSU designations, were tasked with training responsibilities for developing port security skills as well as the traditional domestic emergency missions, such as search and rescue, marine safety and pollution response. Predictably, reserve personnel were only marginally successful in both areas of skill development.

EARLY FIELD TRAINING EXERCISES (FTX)

Initially, Coast Guard Reservists served as observers, instructors and inter-service force elements in early training of joint military harbor defense operations. Through the mid-1980s, port security training at Reserve Units took on greater substance and depth with lectures and demonstrations by U.S. Army Military Police, U.S. Air Force Security Forces and Marine Corps perimeter security specialists and combat trainers.

In 1984, the first field training activity was conducted at the former submarine repair docks located at U.S. Naval Station, Truman Annex, Key West, FL. Ocean Venture '84 was a joint military exercise that incorporated small boat tactics, landside security patrols and concluded with simulated attacks provided by Navy SEALs serving as opposition forces (OPFOR). At the time, the exercise patrol craft consisted of Coast Guard recreation boats and other small craft that had been rendered inoperative and were awaiting destruction. Reserve Unit Milwaukee machinery technicians, who in civilian life worked at the Outboard Marine Corporation and the Harley Davidson Motor Company, repaired the boat engines so well that USCGR boat crews successfully secured the simulated port and vessel against Navy SEAL infiltration. The success of Coast Guard forces highlighted the potential for the Coast Guard Reserve to perform port security missions.

MARINE CORPS COMBAT SKILLS COURSE (CSC)

It became apparent that a more detailed training effort was necessary for reserve personnel that were to man the PSUs. The additional combat skills training was provided by the Marine Corps in 1986 and 1988 at Camp Upshur, located aboard Marine Base Quantico, VA. With training provided by the Basic School, 180 Reserve trainees stood up as three identifiable Port Security Units for the first time. Reservists from Buffalo (PSU-301), Cleveland (PSU-302) and Milwaukee (PSU-303) participated in a two-week intensive and rigorous training evolution culminating with a field exercise where Marines served as OPFOR. The success of this training formulated a sense of pride and esprit de corps among the three units as a result of achieving a new identity along with skills and knowledge.

FIRST AUTOMATIC WEAPON TRAINING

Initial PSU training with automatic weapons occurred during the 1986 Combat Skills Course instruction at Camp Upshur and again repeated in 1988. Additional combat training was provided in 1988 and 1989 by the Ohio National Guard at Camp Perry, OH, with the initial "Flame River" exercises. This was the first time that PSU personnel fired the ring-mounted M2 and M-60 automatic weapons while underway. Simultaneously, the PSU Maritime Security Teams conducted shore and waterside security training activities. With increased DoD funding, additional uniforms and equipment were provided as the importance of the Coast Guard's role for conducting deployable port security missions was recognized by the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

TRANSPORTABLE PORT SECURITY BOAT

In 1988, three reserve units received six 22-foot Transportable Port Security Boats (TPSB) each, better known by their Boston Whaler model name "Raider". These boats were especially equipped with a gunwale ring that allowed for the mounting of three automatic weapons, two M-60s and one .50

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caliber M2 machineguns. Each gun could be moved 360 degrees on the ring to bring a substantial amount of fire power upon a target. However, modification was later made to remove one of the gun mounts, leaving two weapons, configured as required by the area of operations, whether it was two M-60s or one M-60 and one M2.

Each PSU began local training at their respective homeports. Shortly thereafter, units were placed on alert for potential deployment to the Persian Gulf to enhance underway security for Kuwaiti oil tankers that had been attacked by Iranian gunboats. The operational plan was to deploy PSU boats and crews to Navy Landing Ship Docks (LSDs) and to launch the TPSBs from the well-decks of the LSDs to repel enemy small boat attacks on the tankers. Although not implemented, this strategy was a component of Operation Earnest Will between July 24, 1987 and September 26, 1988. The alert was terminated following the unfortunate Iran Air Flight 655 incident involving USS Vincennes and the damage to a Navy frigate, USS *Samuel B. Roberts* (FFG-58) by a floating mine.

PSU OPERATIONS AND TRAINING MANUAL

Following the completion of the second Combat Skills Course, Commander, Ninth Coast Guard District began development of a PSU tactical doctrine which culminated in the Port Security Unit Tactics and Operations Manual which was finalized on April 14, 1989. The manual would be used by all three PSUs over the next nine months in real world operations.

OPERATION BRIGHTSTAR '87 & '88

In 1987, PSU-301 participated in Operation Brightstar '87, an FTX exercise conducted by DoD somewhere in the Middle East. In 1987, Reservists from Buffalo arrived in Aqaba, Jordan, to provide real-world security for U.S. military ships offloading equipment and personnel for the

exercise. Coast Guard personnel also worked with, and provided training for the Jordanian Coast Guard during the three-week training exercise. In 1988, PSU-302 participated in Brightstar as well. The exercises gave a much needed perspective of the Middle Eastern culture and environment and an opportunity to test the skills learned in a real-world scenario.



PSU-301 manned 22' TPSB at the Port of Al-Jubail during Operation Desert Shield/Storm
~ Photo: PSU301

OPERATION POTENT ARCHER '88

In 1988, PSU-301 was tasked with providing waterside security for a Joint Chiefs of Staff conference that was held at NAS Pensacola, FL. The week-long conference required PSU, Navy and Marine Corps personnel to provide a 24-hour security perimeter around the conference area with the PSU maintaining a waterside security zone. It also offered an opportunity for the Coast Guard to provide a demonstration of the PSU's waterborne interdiction capabilities for the Joint Chiefs.

OPERATION AHUAS TARA '90

In March 1990, elements of PSU-301 participated in FTX 2-90, Operation Ahuas Tara, which was held in the Central American country of Honduras. Unlike previous exercises, where the

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PSU TPSBs (Transportable Port Security Boats) and associated support equipment were transported by Air Force cargo aircraft, the 22-foot Raider boats were placed aboard the *USS AUSTIN (LPD-4)*, used as the flagship for the exercise. FTX 2-90 commenced with the offloading of two vessels while PSU crews manned three TPSBs and provided 24-hour real-world waterside security operations with their TPSBs as directed by U.S. Navy Mobile Inshore Underwater Warfare (MIUW) Unit-202 and/or the Navy flagship. One TPSB was underway while two were in standby at the LPD.

OPERATION DESERT SHIELD/DESERT STORM 1990-91

On August 4, 1990, as the Coast Guard celebrated its 200th birthday at Grand Haven, MI, Saddam Hussain's Iraqi forces had already invaded Kuwait. In response, the three PSUs were placed on



PSU-301 unit flash during Desert Storm

alert for possible deployment. Within six weeks, two PSUs deployed to Persian Gulf ports to support combat efforts in Kuwait and Saudi Arabia. On September 18, 1990, PSU-303 of Milwaukee deployed to King Abdul Aziz Port Ad Dammam, Saudi Arabia. On September 21, 1990, PSU-301 of Buffalo, NY, mobilized and deployed to the Jubail Commercial Port located further north in the Persian Gulf at the Saudi Arabian city of Al-Jubail. PSU-303 of Cleveland, OH, arrived in theater on Thanksgiving Day, November 22, 1990 and commenced port security operations at Manama, Bahrain. This was the first Title 10 mobilization of the Coast Guard Reserve since its founding in 1941.

LIVING CONDITIONS

Upon arrival in theater, PSUs found living conditions were challenging, logistical support was



PSU-301 compound on the pier at the Jubail Commercial Port, Al-Jubail, Saudi Arabia
~ Photo: PSU301

minimal, operational planning lacked interservice coordination, supplies were meager and initially, morale declined. But through sheer force of will, ingenuity and inter-service negotiations, Coast Guard Reservists from the three Ninth District PSUs pulled things together.

An example of unit ingenuity, PSU-301 "acquired" portable wooden showers from the Army and often traded and bartered for resilient material to enhance the living area and protection of their area located on the pier. Hard-backing for tents were acquired through bartering and providing boat rides and fishing excursions for key DoD personnel that resulted in obtaining needed items that would take weeks to get through the normal requisition process. The can-do spirit made the uncomfortable, bearable.

As sandbags became harder to acquire, an alternative means for protecting the living area of PSU-301 was required. Dunnage offloaded from the ammunition ships was in great quantity. 4x4s were obtained to make protective walls that were filled with sand to separate the tents that made up the living and working areas. Covered with thick planking, the walls became a worktop where weapons could be cleaned and clothing washed.

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PSU-301 Boat House at Jubail Commercial Port constructed from discarded dunnage ~ Photo: PSU-301

Even a boat house for briefing boat crews was constructed along with a workout shed and eating area all from discarded dunnage. Personnel from the Army, Marines, Fleet Hospital Five and British Forces were regular visitors at PSU-301's compound, enjoying the 24hrs continuous movies in the large movie tent.

COAST GUARD LANTAREA VISITS AOR



VADM Howard Thorsen, Commander LANTAREA, visits with member of PSU-303 ~ Photo: PSU-303

Because all Ninth District PSUs were under the command of Commander, Coast Guard Atlantic Area (LANTAREA) following deployment, Vice Admiral Howard Thorsen visited the two PSUs to observe their operations and assess their needs. The work-ethic and mission-commitment of all three PSUs was so apparent that when the Area Commander departed the AOR, he noted the operational effectiveness and logistics needs of each PSU and positively commended their performance. Within weeks, units were supplied with additional uniform items, chemical biological (CBR) equipment, boat maintenance parts and a range of operational equipment that had been lacking at the time of deployment or were to have been provided by other services in the joint -military area.



LT. Steve Day, Operations Officer at PSU-303 in Ad Damman with SCUD debris ~ Photo: PSU-303

TWO PORTS EXPOSED TO SCUD MISSILE ATTACKS

On January 21, 1991, at approximately 0200 hrs, a SCUD missile was intercepted by a Patriot anti-missile battery over the Port of Ad Damman, the location of PSU-303. Debris fell into the port near the PSU barracks and the off-load pier.

On February 16, 1991, at 0207 hrs. local time, a SCUD missile landed in the water of the Jubail Commercial Port, near the encampment of PSU-301. The chemical alarms throughout the immediate

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COOPERATIVE PATROLS WITH SAUDI FRONTIER FORCES AND BAHRAIN DEFENSE FORCE

To utilize the geographical familiarity and language translation capabilities of Saudi military forces, PSU-301 and 303 developed cooperative



LT. Steve Day, (on right) Operations Officer, PSU-303 with Saudi Defense Force patrol boat at the port of Ad Dammam
~ Photo: PSU-302

agreements to employ Saudi Frontier personnel at gates and perimeters at Ad Dammam and during underway patrols at both ports in the TPSBs. In addition, Saudi patrol vessels were used for mine sweeping operations and to maintain security in anchorages and seaways. In like manner, PSU-302 developed a solid working relationship with the Bahrain Defense Force (BDF). The Saudi and Bahrain riders performed duties as interpreter when PSU crews were conducting boardings or to warn civilian boats to stay clear of the restricted zones, including the pier in the Port of Manama, Bahrain.

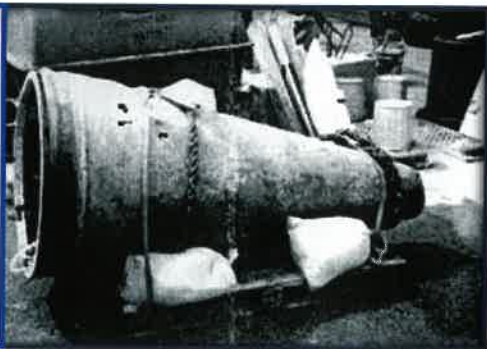
PSU REPLACEMENT UNIT TRAINING

During the opening months of 1991, the Coast Guard committed to some excellent training at Camp Blanding, FL, in preparation for a second



SCUD missile wreckage at the Jubail Commercial Port ~ Photo: PSU-301

SCUD missile unexploded warhead ~ Photo: PSU-301



area activated and a warning loudspeaker from the nearby British Forces compound broadcasted that there were chemicals present. (See the Spring 2018 issue of the CGCVA Quarterdeck Log for more details about the attack.) The next day, PSU-301 boatcrews and Navy EOD divers recovered the warhead and missile debris from the harbor.



PSU-301 TPSB patrolling the waters off the Port of Al Jubail with Saudi Forces interpreter on board ~ Photo: PSU 301

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PSU-301, Port of Al Jubail, Saudi Arabia
PSU-303, Port of Ad Dammam, Saudi Arabia
PSU-302, Port of Manama, Bahrain

wave of PSUs. This comprehensive training was conducted by a mix of Ohio National Guard and Marine Corps instructors. The training was drawn from the operational practices recently developed and used during Operation Desert Shield and now Desert Storm and was intended to expand the skills and knowledge of Coast Guard Reservists who volunteered for mobilization as replacements for the initially deployed units. This preparation provided an excellent template for future PSU training programs and qualification indicators. It also gave direction to equipment acquisitions, rapid deployment loadout needs and budgetary commitments.

FORMAL PSU TRAINING SYSTEM

An important concept emerged during the replacement training experience. It became clear that formal training and qualification for port

security operations was needed for Coast Guard Reservists who are assigned to PSUs. Upon returning CONUS following the war, Coast Guard Reserve units were again called to Camp Perry not only to train, but to assist in the development of a formal training curriculum created to qualify future PSUs and personnel. Although equipment and budgetary shortfalls were apparent, one could immediately see the enhanced confidence and improved skills of those who had been deployed to the Persian Gulf AOR during Desert Shield and Desert Storm.

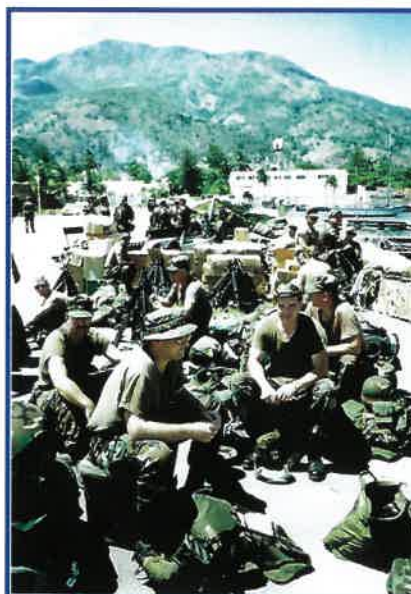
PSU CONCEPT DISCUSSION

In the months following the end of Desert Storm, the Coast Guard considered terminating the PSU program. PSUs 301 and 303 were disbanded, with some of their personnel volunteering for assignment with PSU-302. As an intervention, RADM (then CAPT) J. T. Riker, USCGR (ret), convinced the Commander, Ninth Coast Guard District, that it was strategically important to maintain a port security capability and to support the transition of Reserve Unit Cleveland to drill full-time as PSU-302 at Camp Perry. Reserve Unit Cleveland not only became the first Reserve Unit to maintain its own operational equipment, feed and house its members but also the first to have a small cadre of dedicated active duty personnel assigned to the unit. Further, PSU-302 assumed responsibility for all PSU equipment of the decommissioned PSU-301 and PSU-303 units. Between 1992 and August 1994, CAPT Riker tasked PSU-302 with the creation of operational, tactical and qualification manuals along with equipment lists for the PSU program. Even with the development of these multiple foundations and platforms for port security training, PSU-302 was advised in May 1994 that their upcoming participation in Operation Forward Sentinel would be the last operational use of a PSU. The Coast Guard had decided to terminate the program. However, later that year, Operation Uphold Democracy changed everything.

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PSU-302 berthing in a Port au Prince, Haiti, warehouse shared with U.S. Army personnel in 1994 ~ Photo: PSU-302



PSU-301 taking a break from setting up tent camp on the pier of Cap Haitien, Haiti, in 1994 ~ Photo: PSU-301

OPERATION UPHOLD DEMOCRACY A catalyst for development of additional PSUs

Operation Uphold Democracy confirmed that the Coast Guard would be called upon again to perform the expeditionary port security mission. In 1994, personnel from Buffalo and Cleveland were mobilized as PSU-301 and PSU-302, respectively, for Operation Uphold Democracy in support of military contingency operations at Cap Haitien and Port au Prince, Republic of Haiti. Coast Guard Reserve personnel reported to Camp Perry for equipment issue, operational briefings and for transportation to the theater of operations.

At both locations, PSUs performed with distinction in joint military operations, largely because of their improved qualifications, previous deployment and focused training. As a result, senior DoD planners requested that the Coast Guard extend the PSU program. Upon returning from the deployment, and using the documents that PSU-302 had previously created, the decision was made to establish additional PSUs.

ESTABLISHING ADDITIONAL PSUs

In 1995, the number of PSUs were again at three units with the addition of PSU-305 at Fort Eustis,

VA, and PSU-311 in Long Beach, CA, with PSU-302 now designated as PSU-309 at Camp Perry, OH, with reserve personnel volunteering from all around the Great Lakes region. These reservists traveled at their own expense to Camp Perry each month to train with PSU-309. In the years that followed, another five PSUs were established, the second PSU-301 at Cape Cod, MA, PSU-307 in Tampa, FL, PSU-308 in Gulfport, MS, PSU-312 in San Francisco, CA, and PSU-313 in Tacoma, WA, for a total of eight PSUs.

Each PSU has 140 billets assigned, of which there are seven active duty personnel that maintain the unit between drill weekends. When mobilized, 117 personnel deploy, although that number can be reduced dependent upon the operational requirements.

HOMELAND SECURITY AND OPERATION IRAQI FREEDOM

Since 1995, the PSUs have participated in numerous training exercises in various regions of the world, including South Korea as well as actual mobilizations for port security operations and as a force multiplier in the wake of a natural disaster, such as a hurricane response. The importance of

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PSUs has become even more apparent following the attack on the *USS COLE (DDG-67)* by suicide bombers operating a waterborne improvised explosive laden vessel. The *USS COLE* attack was perpetrated on October 12, 2000, during refueling operations at the Port of Aden, Yemen.

In the aftermath of the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, several PSUs were called to provide waterborne security in various U.S. ports, including New York City.

On November 25, 2002, President George W. Bush signed the Homeland Security Act into law



32' TPSBs currently used by PSUs. Armed with two M2HB .50 cal machineguns and two M240B 7.62mm machineguns, anti-swimmer grenades and small arms. Powered by twin 225hp engines with a speed of 40-45 knots.

that established the Department of Homeland Security (DHS). As a result, the Coast Guard became one of the 22 agencies that became a unified, integrated Cabinet Level agency. The formal transfer of the Coast Guard to DHS did not take place until March 1, 2003.

In the following years, Coast Guard PSUs have deployed numerous times to support Operation Iraqi Freedom contingency operations and to provide waterside security at the Guantanamo (GTMO) detention facility where some of the most dangerous terrorists that have been captured on the battlefield remain in confinement. The current PSU

rotation to GTMO is about every five years for a six month deployment.

PSUs LED THE WAY

The success of the Port Security Unit program led the way for the subsequent establishment of the Maritime Safety and Security Teams (MSST) and the Maritime Security Response Teams (MSRT) where the waterborne tactics used by the MSST were first developed and tested by the Reserve-manned PSUs. That this could occur at all is a tribute to the men and women who pioneered the original training, persevered in the face of adversity and met challenges head-on. In the process, they overcame numerous obstacles to forge and define a new mission and training regime for the United States Coast Guard.

The original members of PSUs 301, 302 and 303 are proud of the men and women of today's modern overseas rapid-deployment Port Security Units and the Homeland Security MSSTs and are proud to have played a critical role in their development. We wish them God's protection in every mission. We know that whatever the mission - they will do it well—because like others of our service since 1790, they remain **SEMPER PARATUS, Always Ready!**

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Left to right: Southwest Asian Service Medal, Kuwait Liberation Medal, (Saudi Arabia) Kuwait Liberation Medal, (Kuwait)