

CANADA'S COAST GUARD *at the crossroads*

**CCG appears to be an orphan
with many foster parents**

CCG vessel, *Osprey* returning to base along English Bay after rescue operation

BY TIM LYNCH

The Canadian Coast Guard (CCG) is an icon in Canadian society. The red and white hull of its vessels identifies the service with the colours of the Canadian flag and the ceremonial red tunics of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP). Canadians hear about its accomplishments when lives are threatened off Canada's coasts and the Coast Guard is dispatched to the rescue. The recent CBC National Road show has left Canadians with images of another Canadian icon, Peter Mansbridge, on the deck of the CCG icebreaker *Louis S. St-Laurent* as it traversed the frozen ice of the North West Passage charting Canada's final frontier. The CCG and RCMP have recently discovered that the mythology supporting their iconic status in Canadian society is challenged when the Auditor General (AG) questions their governance and accountability.

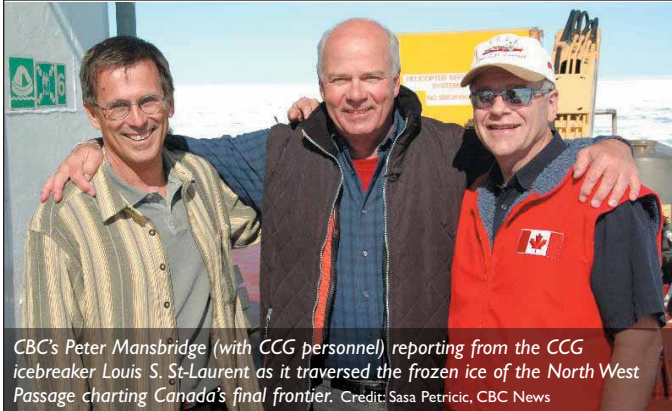
The Importance of the Coast Guard

The AG's 2006 audit, *Managing the Coast Guard Fleet and Marine Navigational Services*, explains the importance of the Coast Guard service:

"The safe and efficient passage of vessels through Canadian waters depends on reliable and sophisticated marine navigation systems. Like others around the world, Canadian mariners are increasing their reliance on electronic navigation rather than traditional physical infrastructure such as buoys and light stations. As the main Canadian provider of marine navigational services, the Coast Guard must make the same transition.

"The Coast Guard also provides icebreaking and search and rescue services, and supports other programs of Fisheries and Oceans Canada, such as science and fisheries management, and those of other government departments. Its fleet is used to gather scientific data for key decisions such as how much fish can be taken by fishers, what species need protecting, and where aquaculture sites can be established. Use of the Coast Guard's fleet is also important to fishery officers who enforce domestic and certain international rules that govern the fisheries."

The audit acknowledges CCG is playing an increasing role in supporting maritime security and that this role has additional implications for managing the fleet and marine navigational services. The role of CCG in maritime security was also addressed by the Standing Senate Committee on National Security and Defence, March 2007. Under the title, "Canada's Toothless Coast Guard" the Senators describe how CCG has not been able to contribute to the defence of Canada's coastlines because it lacks the mandate, the experience, the equipment and the institutional focus to do so. Describing it as a yeoman duty tending buoys, breaking ice, enforcing fisheries regulations, and acting as a ferry service for RCMP patrols, the Senators stress it is not the fault of CCG. The present mandate of the service is only marginally connected to security, and much more focused on the protection of the environment, support of scientific research, facilitation of trade and commerce, navigation



CBC's Peter Mansbridge (with CCG personnel) reporting from the CCG icebreaker *Louis S. St-Laurent* as it traversed the frozen ice of the North West Passage charting Canada's final frontier. Credit: Sasa Petricic, CBC News

safety and emergency response. The Senators note that in the absence of a constabulary role, it is not armed and reports to the Department of Fisheries and Oceans (DFO), all of which contribute to a focus away from guarding Canada's coasts.

An Historical Perspective

In the mid 1990s Parliament decided to move the CCG portfolio from Transport Canada to the DFO. Part of the rationale for the move was the aligning of government marine vessels management. Transport Canada was not seen as having a need for marine vessels, whereas DFO, a science-based organization, deals with regulatory issues requiring a fleet of vessels. The primary duty of CCG is to service the public via search and rescue and serve as a non-military fleet for other government departments. In 2005 CCG became a special operating agency (SPA) within DFO reporting to a Commissioner. The Commissioner reports to the DFO Deputy Minister, but is responsible for budget development and administration within CCG. While administrative efficiencies are achieved from the relationship between CCG and DFO, both entities perform their respective roles with some degree of independence. A concern of the 2006 audit was that the five CCG regions have operated independently and have failed to present a united national program.

The Auditor General's Findings

Reading the AG's report one gets the impression that the federal government is not aware that owning a boat is like filling a hole in the water with money if it is not used appropriately. Individuals or corporations spend their money on boats for two purposes – pleasure or business. The trade-off between one's disposable income and one's desire to participate in such pleasures dictate one's willingness to spend on boating. Market forces and the need for a return on investment dictate how money is spent on the business use of marine vessels.

The AG's report on the CCG is a classic account of how persons responsible for administration of public funds (other people's money) are not subject to such personal emotions and market discipline. In the absence of an "invisible hand," public programs are subject to good governance. In the absence of good governance the program is similar to a stack

of cards on a layer of sand that is threatened by liquefaction at the next tectonic shift in the political imbroglio of government administration.

The AG's 2006 report also lists areas where, in the absence of vision and leadership, the CCG organization does not meet the expectations listed above. As subsequently noted by the Senate, the AG report states that adaptation of marine technologies, and the assumption of new duties like maritime security, was evolving more than being directed within a national strategy.

Guarding Canada's Coastline

The "guarding" service of the Canadian Coast Guard is described as providing a service akin to a lifeguard at the swimming pool. Through its use of advanced electronic technology CCG monitors marine radio communications along the length of the coastline and observes vessel traffic on sophisticated radar screens. They can alert vessels that may be in danger, possibly from colliding and are always on standby to respond to an emergency. In an emergency CCG provides crewed vessels to support shore operations in the affected area. Radio and telecommunications network support along the entire coast is provided for broadcast and coordination purposes during an emergency from land-based and floating platforms.

Search and Rescue

The Coast Guard participates in search and rescue, civil assist and humanitarian operations under the coordination of the Rescue Coordination Center or local on-scene commander under the auspices of the National Search and Rescue Secretariat (NSS). The NSS is an independent agency of government reporting to the Minister of National Defence. In addition to CCG the NSS coordinates emergency response activities of Department of National Defence, Royal Canadian Mounted Police (Public Safety Canada), Transport Canada, Meteorological Service of Canada (Environment Canada) and Parks Canada (Agency).

The View from Here

Besides providing ammunition for opposition parties in our



Frank Ross aboard his tuna fishing vessel, *Velma C* in Steveston Harbor

adversarial system of government, AG Reports serve to guide government officials in their administration of public funds. The 2006 report acknowledges that recommendations made in its 1983, 2000 and 2002 audits were not followed, suggesting that those in power can ignore the AG. At the receiving end such spending practices translate into individual performance by government employees and value-added services provided to clients at time of need.

Frank Ross has been an owner-operator fisherman since 1972. Based out of Steveston, he has fished the West Coast from Alaska to central Oregon and 200 miles out. Discussing his impression of the Canadian Coast Guard Frank said, "Every member of the Coast Guard I have met over the years has been very knowledgeable and professional about their work. Paramedics and radio engineers know how to provide assistance under extenuating circumstances which can be life saving.



CCG hovercraft on a rescue exercise at Garry Point, Steveston

"Are they well supported by politicians," Ross asks? "When the government says, 'DFO, cut your budget by 10%' I get the impression budget cuts ripple through to the Coast Guard first. It always seems that the Americans respond faster and this is because they have the resources. Canadian Coast Guard relies on military flyovers taking pictures, while the American Coast Guardsmen come on board and check out your papers."

Commenting on the changing role of the Coast Guard, Ross says, "Fishermen generally communicate in code so it is difficult to see value in monitoring local communications. The satellite phone email can now provide long distance

communications. The Global Marine Vessel Safety System (GMVSS) alerts the closest ship when one is in distress and we all respond to such alerts. These technologies may make some aspects of Coast Guard duties redundant but it sure feels comfortable knowing there is a well trained individual whom you can relate to should anything go wrong."

Two Unique West Coast Services

Avadepth: As we have witnessed recently in the absence of organized dredging, the depth of the Fraser River can change significantly depending on the quantity of water flowing down from the Rockies against the tidal flow from the Gulf of Georgia (see A Katrina Waiting to Happen, *Mariner Life*, April 2006). To ensure vessels can navigate safely through a river whose bottom is constantly changing the Coast Guard created Avadepth, which is an acronym for available depths. This service was first developed in 1986 to assist river pilots in determining the maximum available draft and the best sailing times on the Fraser River. In 1997, Avadepth was made available to the public on the Internet. It now incorporates user functionality and interactivity and allows Avadepth clients to calculate transit windows to a minimum or maximum draft, view current and historical sounding plans, look at predicted water levels in the river and quickly view current channel conditions identifying shallow areas in the river. This flexibility was deemed essential for users of the Fraser River. (see The Fraser River, *Mariner Life*, September 2006).

Cooperative Vessel Travel Services (CVTS): In December 1979, the American and Canadian governments established an arrangement that ensures safe travel of all marine vessels entering the Juan de Fuca Strait and transcending Boundary Pass between the Canadian Gulf Islands of British Columbia and the US San Juan Islands of Washington State, as well as protect the delicate marine ecology in the area. This agreement, known as the Cooperative Vessel Traffic Service (CVTS) is administered under the authority of the Commissioner of the Canadian Coast Guard and the Commandant of the US Coast Guard. Through the CVTS agreement international boundary lines are exchanged where vessel traffic passes from one jurisdiction to another.

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David Heap of CCG's Marine Communications and Traffic Services (MCTS) describes how the system works: "Transport Canada puts out regulations concerning size and kind of vessels that have to report into MCTS. All ships coming down Juan de Fuca Strait are un-piloted. Pilots are met in Port Angeles for the Americans and in Victoria for Canadian waters. MCTS Victoria picks up responsibility making sure ships travel safely through Boundary Pass into Vancouver.

"Here we have Canadian services managing ships in American waters and the quid pro quo is that the Americans manage traffic coming out in Canadian waters, which may be a unique aspect of marine vessel management," says Heap. "In summer, everyone is out on their boat. Boats over 20 meters will be talking with the MCTS center. If there is an unidentified contact on the radar screen, we will advise participating vessel traffic if it appears to be of consequence. For example when there is halibut fishing going on just outside Juan de Fuca Strait we would be talking with all vessels coming out. The rules of the road are dictated by Transport Canada's Shipping Act which all vessel operators should be familiar with. Basically, we provide an advisory service," concludes Heap.

Susan Steele, Director Marine Programs, CCG adds, "Because we consider each other an extension of our own system we make sure that the procedures being followed meet each other's needs. If there is a handoff from an American operator to a Canadian operator it is just like they are working in the same center and the other way around. This relationship is always evolving, there is always some new issue that needs to be addressed and considered. What looks like random vessel movements out on the water is really like an orchestrated ballet from our perspective." When asked if 9/11 had influenced the operation of CTVS, she replied,



Leading Seaman and Rescue Specialist, Ms Jamie McNab completes her maintenance inspection of the fast response 733 Hurricane.

"The agreement was designed specifically to promote safety and prevent ecological disaster. Security wasn't so much a concern when we started this process. The only change from the civilian part of traffic flows has been the ever-increasing traffic that is the result of economic growth."

The 2006 AG Report defines the most important part of CCG as: "The safe and efficient passage of vessels through Canadian waters depends on reliable and sophisticated marine navigation systems." The 1979 CVTS arrangement and the 1986 CCG Avadepth program are West Coast examples of modern and reliable maritime navigation systems that predate the interest of the Auditor General in Coast Guard Services.

An Orphan Service

CCG appears to be an orphan with many foster parents. It is beholden to Transport Canada in its management of the marine transportation corridors, yet is housed in DFO. There are various convoluted logistics offered explaining why such arrangements exist. They all have an odour of past political expediencies. CCG also seems almost to be a Paramilitary organization. When critical decision making is required, the CG appears subservient to the Department of National



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Defence. The role of providing taxi services to regulators and law enforcement personnel seems a suboptimal use of this public resource. These observations, along with the lack of specific legislation, suggest that CCG is an orphan that is subject to abuse.


A New Maritime Policing Paradigm

Affectionately known as the "British Model," the CCG's "guarding" functions are an artifact of Canada's colonial past when British Bobbies didn't carry guns. But in our post 9/11 world, even that much beloved institution has evolved to serve the realities of today's global village.

During a public seminar at the Liu Center of International Relations, UBC's Dr. Andreas Schloenhardt, an international authority on transnational organized crime described how organized crime now has global implications. While air cargo, people and the postal system are used for drug trafficking, larger maritime crimes are linked to trafficking in persons (sex) and firearms. The policing functions of investigations, searches, arrests and prosecutions in the context of non-security issues beyond the border, enter into the parameters of national defence and the military. Noting that the wider impact of criminal acts on governance and corruption relates to the defence portfolio, Schloenhardt said, "In terms of transnational criminal activities we really need to challenge

the traditional separation of law enforcement and the application of military force."

The interface between the navy on patrol to the police on the beat in Canada is a complex web of interdepartmental jurisdictions (see, Domestic Maritime Security, *Mariner Life*, January 2007 and VPD Marine Unit, *Mariner Life*, April 2007). Consequently, the Canadian solution lies in multi-sector committees such as Interdepartmental Marine Security Working Group (IMSWG) or Maritime Security Operation Center (MSOC). And the elephant in the room in maritime law enforcement appears to be the precise role of Canada's national equestrian police force, the RCMP. There seems to be some cultural impediment to allowing policing duties to expand beyond the realm of the RCMP, or perhaps it is a question of cost? Such a paradigm shift may include reassessment of Fisheries Officers (see, Illegal Fishing, *Fisherman Life*, April 2007), Transport Canada Inspectors, Canadian Border Services Agency and Coast Guard personnel as well as Canadian Forces in the context of protecting Canadians from organized crime and subversive elements that would do them harm.

Postscript: While working on this article at the Vancouver Kitsilano CCG station in mid-July, I became involved in three successive CCG rescues over a two and a half hour period. An account of this experience will be published in the September issue of *Fisherman Life*. TL. 



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