

Coast Guardsman, Not Guardian

As many of you already know, the Coast Guard is moving away from the term "Guardian" and we've received numerous questions regarding what should be used instead. Senior Leadership is in the process of reviewing all material within their AORs (web, printed material, etc.) and replacing the few remaining uses of "Guardian" with "Coast Guardsman."

Nothing published or issued from the second deck over the past year has used the term "Guardian" and we have watched the term fade for the past couple of years. Furthermore, we don't "own" Guardian. It is used by several other organizations (commercial and otherwise), including the National Guard. "Coast Guardsman" is backed by almost 100 years of history and tradition. It clearly identifies a person serving in the Coast Guard as a member of the Coast Guard (i.e. Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen, Marines, and COAST GUARDsmen). Coast Guardsman is gender neutral (just like Airmen) and it has stood the test of time.

There are a couple of related issues still to be addressed, including the "Guardian Ethos" and the use of "Guardian" slogans. For example, D8 has used "Guardians of the Gulf" and D9 has used "Guardians of the Great Lakes" for many years. They used the term Guardian in this context long before the move to call our individuals Guardians instead of Coast Guardsmen. These slogans will likely stand. The Guardian Ethos will likely require some modification - CG 092 has already been tasked with developing a way ahead for the Guardian Ethos.

In case you were wondering where the Commandant stands on this issue, Admiral Papp responded with the following when questioned on the use of "Guardian" and whether "Coastie" is an appropriate term:

"I use the term "Coast Guardsmen", not "Coastie". It is the only term that never changes. I didn't create it. It is based in Title 14 USC which in 1915 gave our service the title "Coast Guard".

We worked hard over the years to get included when other services chiefs and senior leaders refer to the FIVE armed forces. All the Joint Chiefs and the SecDef always refer to the Services as: Army, Navy, Air Force, Marine Corps, and Coast Guard. When they talk about the people, they say: Soldiers, Sailors, Marines, Airmen, and Coast Guardsmen.

I'm proud to be included in that way...and I think it's presumptuous and improper for any Coast Guardsman to come up with new labels/names, and an insult to our heritage. I do use the term "Coasties" from time to time, but only as a shorthand term of endearment, just like I use "shipmates".

I would contend that I, as Commandant, or any other Commandant for that matter, have no authority to change what we are called, because in the law, we are the Coast Guard.

This is a quote from my change of command speech:

We are privileged to be members of a very unique Service that, due to our collection of missions, and legacy agencies, sometimes defies logic when someone attempts to classify us, or to place a label on us. As we continue this voyage over the next 4 years, we will be defined

by our missions, people and heritage. We will selflessly serve our country, and perform our duties in a manner that secures the trust and confidence of mariners and citizens alike. We will set a course that Steadies the Service, Honors our Profession, Strengthens our Partnerships, and Respects our Shipmates.

So when I am pressed for an answer by those who try to define, classify, characterize or label us...whenever I've been asked to describe what I am, I have always replied definitively, succinctly, accurately, sincerely and with pride: I...am a Coast Guardsman... We...are the men and women of the United States Coast Guard."

- Admiral Bob Papp

I share the Admiral's view on this issue. That said, please share this information and help us lead this initiative. Thank you. You take care.

Vr

MCPOCG Michael P. Leavitt