

COAST GUARD SERVICE

In a statement in the House of Commons January 20 regarding coast guard service provided in Canada, Transport Minister George Hees pointed out that with perhaps two important exceptions, both of which are covered by other Government agencies, the substantial fleet of vessels maintained by the Department of Transport performs the same functions as those of the United States Coast Guard and, as well a great many additional functions.

United States coast Guard activities are devoted in large part to provision and maintenance of buoys, lights and other floating and fixed aids to navigation, and the supply of isolated stations, such as lighthouses. They also provide some icebreaking and related navigational assistance. The Department of Transport maintains a fleet of over 30 vessels, located on the Pacific and Atlantic coasts, and in the St. Lawrence and Great Lakes areas, which also perform these functions, as well as concentrating on coastal icebreaking work and major convoy and navigational assistance in the Arctic areas during the summer season. The Department has built and is building a number of excellent new vessels to satisfy this requirement.

The Department's vessels do not undertake police patrol activities. This function is carried out very effectively by the R.C.M.P., which also has a number of special cutters operating on both coasts and the Great Lakes for this purpose, the Minister said.

Usually references to a coastguard are connected with marine search and rescue, since this is a field in which the United States Coast Guard receives, from time to time, considerable publicity, Mr. Hees pointed out. In the United States, the Coast Guard has been charged with a major role in the field of search and rescue generally, and performs tasks of search and rescue in coastal areas, both for air and marine purposes. Its activities in this field are based largely upon the maintenance and operation of a very substantial fleet of specialized aircraft, supplemented as well, where the need arises by its coastal vessels. In Canada, this function is performed by the Department of National Defence, through the R.C.A.F., which has followed generally the same course as the United States Coast Guard in developing specialized aircraft and personnel to assist in the matter of search and rescue - in fact, on an even broader basis than in the United States, because the R.C.A.F. in its operations covers not only coastal areas, but inland territory as well.

Moreover, the R.C.A.F. search and rescue keeps in touch with various vessels operated by the various government departments, as well as private vessels, so that in co-ordination of marine activities they are in a position to carry out the same function as the United States Coast Guard.

Continuing, Mr. Hees said:

"To provide a fleet of special vessels solely for marine search and rescue work in Canadian waters would be a large and expensive undertaking, and it should be remembered that a very efficient organization is now maintained through co-ordination of the activities of the various vessels operated by the Royal Canadian Navy, the Department of Fisheries, the R.C.M.P., and my own Department.

"To assist as much as possible in this regard, we have kept the problems of marine search and rescue very much in mind in developing our own departmental ship programme, and most of our new ships will be provided with helicopter platforms, since it is now well established that helicopters have a major role to play in marine search and rescue.

"As new ships become available, it will undoubtedly be desirable to expand our helicopter operations in connection with our ships, provided the necessary funds are voted for this purpose by Parliament.

"I might point out, in this connection, that my Department now operates some four supply ships on the Pacific Coast, as well as three weather ships; five vessels in the Great Lakes area; about a dozen ships in the Ottawa and St. Lawrence River and Gulf area; and about nine in the Atlantic area. These are available to assist in marine search and rescue work in their respective areas, along with the ships operated by the Department of Fisheries and the R.C.M.P.

"Moreover, in connection with our programme to replace older vessels, we are now calling tenders for one specially designed vessel for the Atlantic coast and one for the Pacific coast, each to carry a helicopter, of a type which should, in addition to being useful agency ships, be of special value for marine search and rescue work.

"Just as the United States Coast Guard maintains special ships for ocean weather stations as part of its programme, so does the Department of Transport. The weather ship service was established by international agreement, and Canada's responsibility under this agreement calls for the maintenance of this weather station in the Pacific Ocean. This weather station is operated by three special vessels; two in active service and one held in reserve, and these ships, too, are available for marine search and rescue work within the area where they are stationed, in the same way as United States Coast Guard weather station vessels are available.

"The United States Coast Guard has also engaged in work in connection with the growing small boat field, where proper regulation and educational safety programmes have become very important. Here again, my Department has