

Coast Guard Cutter Returns Home After Seizing \$43 Million in Cocaine

VIRGINIA BEACH, Va. – The crew of Coast Guard Cutter Dependable returned home to Virginia Beach, Va., on Feb. 25 after a 59-day patrol in the eastern Pacific Ocean, the Coast Guard 5th District said in a Feb. 26 release.

While deployed, Dependable's crew aided Joint Interagency Task Force South in conducting counter-drug and alien migrant interdiction operations.

During their patrol, Dependable's boarding team intercepted a go-fast vessel off the coast of Mexico that was specially fitted to smuggle contraband. Once on scene, the boarding team confirmed that the vessel was carrying narcotics along with three suspected drug smugglers. The interdiction resulted in the seizure of about 1,235 pounds of cocaine worth an estimated street value of \$18 million.

Dependable's crew also worked alongside four partner assets to patrol an operational area roughly the size of the U.S. The cutter's crew worked with the U.S. Navy and Customs and Border Protection Maritime Patrol Aircraft to conduct aerial surveillance alongside other Coast Guard cutters patrolling the region. As a result of these collaborations, Dependable's crew was able to assist Coast Guard Cutter Alert's crew with a transfer of drugs and suspected smugglers apprehended in previous interdictions.

The Dependable crew also leveraged the cutter's embarked Helicopter Interdiction Tactical Squadron (HITRON), the members of which launched in an MH-65 Dolphin helicopter and disrupted a drug-smuggling operation. The squadron seized an estimated 1,653 pounds of cocaine worth about \$25 million and

intended for delivery to Mexico.

The Dependable crew sailed 12,904 miles and traveled nearly as far south as the Galapagos Islands and as far west as Acapulco, Mexico. In addition to the cutter's permanent crewmembers, teams from Tactical Law Enforcement Team South, based in Miami, and HITRON, based in Jacksonville, Fla., were aboard for the patrol. Each team provided expertise regarding maritime law enforcement and aerial use of force.

The Virginia Beach-based Cutter Dependable is a 210-foot Reliance-class medium-endurance cutter with a permanent crew of 77. They conduct homeland security missions in the offshore waters of the Western Hemisphere, from New England to the Caribbean Sea and Eastern Pacific.

Having surpassed its 50th year of service to America last November, Dependable and the other 26 medium-endurance cutters are slated for replacement by new Offshore Patrol Cutters beginning in 2021.