Cutter Tampa Returns Home after Interdicting More than $94M of Illicit Drugs

Two Coast Guard Cutter Tampa crewmembers pass a bale of cocaine during a drug offload at Base Miami Beach, Miami, Florida, April 20, 2021. The Tampa crew interdicted a low profile vessel off the coast of Punta Gallinas, Colombia, which resulted in 87 bales of cocaine, weighing approximately 5,500 pounds, and worth an estimated $94.6 million. *U.S. COAST GUARD / Chief Petty Officer Charly Tautfest*

PORTSMOUTH, Va. – The Coast Guard Cutter Tampa returned to its homeport in Portsmouth after completing a 56-day counter narcotics patrol in the Central Caribbean, April 25, the Coast Guard 5th District said in an April 29 release.

The crew of the Tampa began their patrol by embarking an armed helicopter aircrew from the Coast Guard's Helicopter Interdiction Tactical Squadron in Mayport, Florida, which the

crew used in conjunction with their over-the-horizon-capable pursuit boat to stop suspected drug smuggling vessels.

During their patrol, a maritime patrol flight spotted a vessel on April 9, and a law enforcement team from the Tampa detained three suspects and discovered 87 bales of cocaine, totaling approximately 5,500 pounds of cocaine, worth an estimated $94.6 million.

The crew of the Tampa's efforts to combat drug smuggling in the Caribbean are part of Operation Martillo, a larger effort to increase regional stability and undermine the influence of Transnational Criminal Organizations, who routinely attempt to smuggle drugs throughout the region.

The Tampa crew prioritized readiness during the COVID-19 pandemic and incorporated a series of precautionary measures to include personal protective equipment, as well as the incorporation of vaccinations for members to ensure its crew, family members and community continue to remain safe while achieving mission excellence.

"This was our third patrol we have conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic, and the crew of the Tampa never ceases to impress me with their incredible perseverance, devotion, and adaptability that they use to tackle each patrol and achieve mission success," said Capt. Michael Cilenti, Tampa's commanding officer. "Of course, I would be remiss in not mentioning the true heroes of this patrol, and every patrol: our family and friends back at home, who constantly support us and give us the inspiration to work that much harder. Our success in interdicting the first Caribbean low profile vessel is a testament to that teamwork and focus on mission excellence that makes Tampa so special."

Bollinger Shipyards Acquires Gulf Island Fabrication's Shipyard Facilities

The Coast Guard accepts delivery of its newest Sentinel-class fast response cutter (FRC), the Coast Guard Cutter Frederick Hatch (WPC 1143), from Bollinger Shipyards in Key West, Florida, Feb. 10, 2021. Bollinger has now acquired Gulf Island Fabrication's shipyard facilities, expanding its construction and repair capacity. *U.S. COAST GUARD / Ensign Alexandra Hughes*

LOCKPORT, La. – Bollinger Shipyards, a privately-held designer and builder of steel military and commercial vessels for the past three quarters of a century, has acquired Gulf Island Fabrication Inc.'s shipyard facilities, expanding Bollinger's new construction and repair capacity and capabilities to better serve its key defense and commercial customers, the

company said in an April 19 release. Financial terms of the transaction were not disclosed.

This acquisition creates expanded opportunities for Bollinger to better serve and deepen its relationships with key defense and commercial customers with an increased capacity for new projects and footprint, access to a larger workforce skilled in steel construction, improved efficiencies and enhanced economies of scale. Current customers for Bollinger include the U.S. Coast Guard, U.S. Navy, General Dynamics-Electric Boat, and non-defense and commercial customers servicing energy production to dredging. Gulf Island had been building the Towing, Salvage and Rescue Ships for the U.S. Navy and Regional Class Research Vessels for the National Science Foundation and Oregon State University. These projects conveyed with the transaction.

“The addition of the new Houma shipyard further strengthens our position within the U.S. defense industrial base as a leading shipbuilder and vessel repair company,” said Ben Bordelon, CEO and president of Bollinger Shipyards. “For 75 years, we’ve developed a deep expertise in and proven track record of building reliable, high endurance steel vessels for the Coast Guard, Navy and our commercial customers. As the needs of these customers change and grow, we are constantly looking for ways to invest in and expand our capabilities and innovative solutions so that we can continue to provide them with the highest levels of quality, support and service in our industry.”

Bordelon continued, “For three quarters of a century, Bollinger’s greatest strength has and continues to be our people and their American ingenuity and quality craftsmanship. I am excited to welcome the Gulf Island Shipyard employees into the Bollinger family. Together, we will ensure that the ‘Bollinger standard’ will be the high bar we measure ourselves against for superior quality and safety as we work to deliver

the next generation of American made high-performance vessels for our government and commercial customers.”

The new Bollinger Houma facility encompasses 437 acres on the west bank of the Houma Navigation Canal, of which 283 acres is unimproved land that is available for expansion. The facility includes 18,000 square feet of administrative and operations facilities, 160,000 square feet of covered fabrication facilities and 20,000 square feet of warehouse facilities. It also has 6,750 linear feet of water frontage, including 2,350 feet of steel bulkheads. Located just 30 miles from the Gulf of Mexico, the strategic location provides short and unrestricted access to the newly acquired Houma facility from open waters.

The acquisition also includes a 15,000-short ton drydock, a 4,000-short ton drydock, a 3,000-short ton drydock and a 1,500-short ton drydock.

Bollinger’s acquisition increases the shipyard’s growing new construction and repair portfolio. In December of last year, Congress appropriated funds for Bollinger to build four additional Sentinel-class Fast Response Cutters (FRCs) for the U.S. Coast Guard. In addition to construction of the FRC, Bollinger is under contract to construct an Ocean Transport Barge and Floating Dry Dock for General Dynamics Electric Boat Division. In addition, Bollinger is participating in industry studies for five government programs, including the U.S. Coast Guard’s Offshore Patrol Cutter and the U.S. Navy’s Common Hull Auxiliary Multi-Mission Platform, Auxiliary General Ocean Surveillance, Large Unmanned Surface Vehicle and Light Amphibious Warship programs.

Elbit Awarded $41M Order as Part of the Night Vision Goggles IDIQ Contract for U.S. Marine Corps

A view of a Marine through the Squad Binocular Night Vision Goggle at night. In January 2020, a group of Marines with The Basic School assessed the Squad Binocular Night Vision Goggle night vision system comprising an image-intensifier binocular and enhanced clip-on thermal imager. *U.S. MARINE CORPS / Sgt. Kirstin Spanu*

HAIFA, Israel – Elbit Systems Ltd.'s U.S. subsidiary, Elbit Systems of America LLC, has been awarded a delivery order valued at approximately $41 million for the supply of night vision systems and various spare components to the U.S. Marine Corps, the company said in an April 20 release. The order will be executed in Roanoke, Virginia, and will be supplied through

March 2022.

This order is part of a $249 million five-year Squad Binocular Night Vision Goggles indefinite delivery indefinite quantity (IDIQ) contract from Sept. 6, 2019, under which the U.S. Marine Corps are supplied with Squad Binocular Night Vision Goggle (SBNVG) systems consisting of high-performance, white phosphor image intensifier binoculars, modular uncooled thermal imaging sensors and common external power supplies – providing Marines improved mobility and situational awareness during night operations.

"Marines need to quickly understand their surroundings and act to engage their targets – no matter the light conditions – and Elbit Systems of America's SBNVG provides this power in a lightweight, adjustable system that is an ideal upgrade," said Raanan Horowitz, president and CEO of Elbit Systems of America.

USS John McCain, USS Georgia Conduct High-Profile Transits to Message Rivals

The MH-60R Seahawk helicopter, attached to the Helicopter Sea Maritime (HSM 48) Squadron, flies above the guided-missile submarine USS Georgia (SSGN 729) as the submarine transits with the Ticonderoga-class guided-missile cruiser USS Port Royal (CG 73) on the Strait of Hormuz, Dec. 21. U.S. Navy / Mass Communication Specialist 2nd Class Indra Beaufort

The U.S. Navy conducted and announced two high-profile ship movements in recent days, both intended to send messages to

international rivals.

In the latest, the USS John McCain (DDG 56) "asserted navigational rights and freedoms in the Spratly Islands, consistent with international law," 7th Fleet public affairs announced Dec. 22.

One day earlier, the nuclear-power Ohio-class guided-missile submarine USS Georgia (SSGN 729), along with the guided-missile cruisers USS Port Royal (CG 73) and USS Philippine Sea (CG 58), transited the Strait of Hormuz entering the Arabian Gulf on Dec. 21, U.S. Naval Forces Central Command announced.

The Navy said the USS John McCain exercise was aimed at "challenging restrictions on innocent passage imposed by China, Vietnam and Taiwan" in the South China Sea.

"Unlawful and sweeping maritime claims in the South China Sea pose a serious threat to the freedom of the seas, including the freedoms of navigation and overflight, free trade and unimpeded commerce, and freedom of economic opportunity for South China Sea littoral nations," the 7th Fleet said in a press release.

China, Vietnam, Taiwan, Malaysia, Brunei, and the Philippines claim sovereignty over some or all of the Spratly Islands. Of those, China, Vietnam, and Taiwan require either permission or advance notification before a foreign military vessel engages in "innocent passage" through the territorial sea, the 7th Fleet noted.

"Under international law as reflected in the Law of the Sea Convention, the ships of all States – including their warships – enjoy the right of innocent passage through the territorial sea. The unilateral imposition of any authorization or advance-notification requirement for innocent passage is not permitted by international law, so the United States challenged these requirements. By engaging in innocent passage

without giving prior notification to or asking permission from any of the claimants, the United States challenged the unlawful restrictions imposed by China, Taiwan, and Vietnam. The United States demonstrated that innocent passage may not be subject to such restrictions."

In what was widely seen as a show of capability to Iran, the Dec. 21 voyage of a heavily armed submarine and cruisers through the Strait of Hormuz, part of the U.S. 5th Fleet area of operations, "demonstrates the U.S. Navy's ability to sail and operate wherever international law allows," U.S. Naval Forces Central Command said in a press release.

"As an inherently flexible maneuver force, capable of supporting routine and contingency operations, Georgia's presence demonstrates the United States' commitment to regional partners and maritime security with a full spectrum of capabilities to remain ready to defend against any threat at any time."

SSGNS are equipped with superior communications capabilities, carry up to 154 Tomahawk land-attack cruise missiles and can also be configured to host up to 66 Special Operations Forces.

The 5th Fleet area of operations encompasses about 2.5 million square miles of water area and includes the Arabian Gulf, Gulf of Oman, Red Sea and parts of the Indian Ocean. The expanse is comprised of 20 countries and includes three chokepoints, which the Navy says are critical to the free flow of global commerce.

Airborne Tactical Advantage to Deliver up to $441M in Contracted Air Services

An MK-58 Hawker Hunter taxis aboard Marine Corps Air Station Beaufort in this 2018 photo. The Hawker Hunter and crew were training with Marine Fighter Attack Training Squadron 501 for multiple weeks to support dissimilar air combat training for F-35B pilots. The aircraft is with the Airborne Tactical Advantage Company. USMC / Lance Cpl. Terry Haynes

NEWPORT NEWS, Va. – Airborne Tactical Advantage Co. (ATAC), part of the Textron Systems segment of Textron Inc., has been selected to continue to provide the U.S. Navy and U.S. Marine Corps with fleet fighter jet training support services under the Fighter Jet Services (FJS) program, the company said in a Nov. 9 release.

ATAC will provide up to 8,500 flight hours per year of fleet support air training services for approximately five years under the indefinite delivery/indefinite quantity contract, worth up to $441 million. The training will be provided by ATAC's fleet of Mirage F1, F-21 Kfir, and Mk58 Hawker Hunter fighter aircraft and is expected to commence in the spring of 2021.

"ATAC is proud to continue providing tactical flight training support services to the U.S. Navy and its allies and partners, further cementing the company as the leader in the contracted air services industry," said Scott Stacy, ATAC General Manager. "We look forward to adding additional years to our two decades of established Navy and Marine Corps support of fleet exercises, ship services, fleet replacement squadron syllabi, fleet squadron adversary requirements, Joint Terminal Attack Controller training and Research, Development, Test and Evaluation flights. With additional ATAC aircraft and pilots

coming online, we are well positioned to continue to expand our flight operations."

In addition to the Navy Fighter Jet Services program, an ATAC-led team trains Joint Terminal Attack Controllers (JTACs) under the U.S. Navy's Terminal Attack Controller Trainer (TACT) program. ATAC has also recently won significant contracts to provide adversary air training for three U.S. Air Force bases and JTAC training services to U.S. Air Force Special Operations Command under the U.S. Air Force Combat Air Forces Contracted Air Support (CAF CAS) program.

ATAC is the global leader of tactical airborne training, having pioneered much of what are now contracted air services industry standards with a fleet of over 90 aircraft, over 65,000 flight hours, and 20 years of operating experience. ATAC has provided a wide range of contracted air support capabilities to the U.S. Department of Defense in locations world-wide, including the Continental United States, Hawaii and the Western Pacific region. ATAC has helped train crews from the U.S. Navy, U.S. Air Force and U.S. Marine Corps and regularly operates out of as many as 25 different air bases per year.

Navy's Newest Yard Tug Delivered to Bremerton

A Yard Tug 808 class tug. Dakota Creek Industries

BREMERTON, Wash. – The Navy's first Yard Tug (YT) 808 class tug recently was delivered to Naval Base Kitsap, Bremerton Annex, the Program Executive Office – Ships said in an Oct. 29 release. Only 17 days after delivery, YT 808 was in the water

assisting USNS Richard Byrd (T-AKE 4) as it moved away from the dock at Naval Magazine Indian Island.

“Narrowing the gap between delivery and providing operational support is a priority for our team,” said Mike Kosar, program manager of Support Ships, Boats, and Craft Program Office within Program Executive Office Ships (PEO Ships). “It’s impressive that almost immediately after delivery YT 808 is at work and contributing to our fleet readiness.”

YT 808 is the lead craft of six total tugs on the Navy’s contract with Dakota Creek Industries, awarded in July 2018. YT 808 is the first Navy vessel constructed to meet EPA Tier 4 marine diesel engine emission standards.

The vessels are designed after the Navy’s existing YT 802 Valiant-class tugs and are built to commercial American Bureau of Shipping standards. The 90’x38′ tugs have a top speed of approximately 12.5 knots and a bollard pull of approximately 43 long tons allowing them to effectively perform towing and ship-handling duties for carriers, surface ships, submarines and barges.

“YT 808 class tugs are replacing legacy single-screw YTB tugs built between 1964 and 1975,” said Kosar. “The new tug provides significantly improved capabilities, safety, and comfort for tug crews executing Port Operations missions in the Northwest Region”

The tugs are outfitted with a hydraulic hawser winch and staple on the forward deck for towing, and an “H” bitt installed on the aft deck with an adjacent hydraulic capstan for tightening lines. Similar to the previous 802 Class, the new YT 808 Class tugs have an improved articulating hydraulic brow installed aft of the deckhouse to allow personnel transfers to and from alongside ships or submarines. A selective catalytic reduction system uses Diesel Exhaust Fluid to clean the exhaust for compliance with EPA Tier 4 marine

diesel emissions requirements.

HII Breaks Ground on Unmanned Systems Center of Excellence

Hampton Mayor Donnie Tuck, Virginia Gov. Ralph Northam and HII Executive Vice President and President, HII Technical Solutions Andy Green break ground on HII's Unmanned Systems Center of Excellence. HII

NEWPORT NEWS, Va. – Huntington Ingalls Industries has broken ground on a new Unmanned Systems Center of Excellence in Hampton, Virginia, the company said in a Sept. 22 release. Two buildings totaling over 150,000 square feet will be constructed on the 20-acre campus and will be purpose-built for unmanned systems prototyping, production and testing.

"With U.S. Navy's increasing demand for UUVs and USVs, we are committed to investing in and expanding our unmanned systems capabilities," said Andy Green, HII executive vice president and president of Technical Solutions. "Our new Unmanned Systems Center of Excellence will ensure we can continue to provide our customers with the most advanced autonomous systems across all class sizes."

The HII Unmanned Systems Center of Excellence, located on the Hampton Roads Center – North Campus, will be a state-of-the-art facility with a high-tech digital manufacturing infrastructure. This agile space will be reconfigurable for different production and systems integration projects and have precision machining capabilities, a surface finishing area and a dedicated welding space.

“Virginia is proud to be home to the largest military shipbuilder in the country,” said Gov. Ralph Northam. “Huntington Ingalls Industries is a national leader in advanced manufacturing, and this investment is a powerful testament to Virginia’s workers and business environment. The company’s new unmanned systems facility in Hampton will support America’s national security and play a key role in strengthening our economic recovery as we continue working to rebound from this health crisis.”

HII partnered with the Virginia Economic Development Partnership, the city of Hampton and the Hampton Roads Alliance to secure the project for Virginia. More than 250 jobs will be created and will enable collaboration with HII’s Newport News Shipbuilding division, which has advanced undersea system engineering capabilities.

“The new campus complements our current facilities in Massachusetts, Florida and Washington that have been delivering marine robotics to the Navy for nearly 20 years,” said Duane Fotheringham, president, Technical Solutions’ Unmanned Systems business group. “In order to manufacture and support large and extra-large UUVs, the size of the manufacturing operation needs to increase significantly. This new facility will give us the space and infrastructure we need to scale our operations to meet the needs of our customers now and into the future.”

The groundbreaking ceremony was also attended by Virginia Secretary of Commerce and Trade Brian Ball; Hampton Mayor Donnie R. Tuck; Hampton Economic Development Director Chuck Rigney Sr., and Rob Brown, president of Robert Brown & Associates.

The first 22,000-square-foot building will be completed by the end of this year. The main 135,000 square-foot-facility is planned to be completed in the fourth quarter of 2021.

Helicopter Sea Combat Squadron 22 gets first MQ-8C Fire Scout UAS

An MQ-8C Fire Scout on the flight deck of the Independence variant littoral combat ship USS Coronado (LCS 4) in 2018. U.S. Navy / Ens. Jalen Robinson

NORFOLK, Va. — Helicopter Sea Combat Squadron 22 received its first MQ-8C Fire Scout unmanned helicopter on Sept. 15 aboard Naval Station Norfolk, the squadron announced.

HSC-22 marks the first East Coast squadron to operate the MH-60S Knighthawk, MQ-8B Fire Scout and MQ-8C Fire Scout. The new added capability of the MQ-8C combines the capabilities of the MQ-8B with the MH-60S Knighthawk to improve the Navy's ability to investigate and target hostile surface contacts, the squadron said. Both Fire Scouts are built by Northrop Grumman.

"Incorporating the MQ-8C will represent a significant improvement in our unmanned air vehicle mission capability," said Cmdr. Matthew Wright, HSC-22's commanding officer. "The 'Charlie' is bigger, faster, can carry more mission equipment, and remain airborne over twice as long as our already-proven MQ-8Bs."

MQ-8B and C Fire Scout variants can be operated from ships or land, extending the ability to support distributed maritime operations. Most of the software is similar across both systems, but the crew must adapt to the C's new capabilities and obtain additional qualifications to operate it.

“The MQ-8C Firescout is the latest step toward increasing the duration that UAS has on the battlefield as well as the impact,” said Lt. Ryan Jaenke, an MH-60s and MQ-8B/C pilot. “It advances the reliability of UAS as well as leaves a larger impact on the battlefield in missions that are not new to today’s warfighter.”

HSC-22’s mission is to provide manned and unmanned maritime attack and combat support capabilities to the fleet. HSC-22’s inherent versatility provides full-spectrum warfighting support across multiple mission sets and diverse and distributed platforms.

AI, Machine Learning, seen revolutionizing undersea activities

A Sail Drone of the type recently used by NOAA to monitor fisheries in Alaska. This one is transiting the southern Chukchi Sea in 2017. U.S. Coast Guard / Petty Officer 3rd Class Amanda Norcross

Artificial intelligence, machine learning and unmanned systems are enabling surface and undersea activities even while COVID-19 hampers the ability to put humans on ships, maritime leaders said during a webinar on Sept. 17.

Retired Rear Adm. Tim Gallaudet, deputy administrator of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration and the former Oceanographer of the Navy, said COVID has put ship deployments on hold for months, but the agency has leveraged autonomous systems to keep the work going.

For instance, NOAA sent Sail Drones to Alaska to perform a critical fishery survey and for coastal mapping.

“We were able to map in pretty shallow areas that would have been hazardous for ships,” Gallaudet said in the webinar, hosted by the Marine Technology Society’s Washington section and the company Oceaneering.

NOAA was also able to use underwater gliders to measure water temperatures, which helped accurately predict the track of Hurricane Laura. This was done with the deployment of just a few operators on small boats in the Caribbean and Gulf of Mexico.

The agency is leveraging artificial intelligence, machine learning, autonomous systems, data management and other advances and “applying those technologies in everything we do,” he said, including setting up a NOAA AI center.

The U.S. Navy is also leaning into these technologies, said Adm. Bill Houston, director of the Undersea Warfare Division in the Office of the Chief of Naval Operations (N97).

His unmanned underwater vehicle portfolio alone is worth $2.8 billion, he said, including the MK18 and the Knifefish, as well as the larger Orca, Razorback and Snakehead UUVs that are being developed. AI and machine learning are going to be key in using these systems and maintaining U.S. overmatch against adversaries, he said.

“We’re not going to be a leader in AI, industry is, [and] we need to go ahead to be able to leverage that with academia,” he said.