

Coast Guard, Partner Agencies Eradicate Illegal Marijuana Plants in the Bahamas

Andros Island, Bahamas – The Coast Guard, Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) and Bahamian authorities have eradicated more than 200,000 illegal marijuana plants in the Bahamas, the Coast Guard 7th District said in a Feb. 22 release.

On Feb. 6, 2019, a Coast Guard forward-deployed MH-60 Jayhawk helicopter crew from Operation Bahamas, Turks & Caicos (OPBAT) recognized what appeared to be a strong smell of marijuana while flying over Andros Island on a joint narcotic interdiction patrol. The Coast Guard helicopter transported United States DEA agents and Royal Bahamas Police Force Officers from the Drug Enforcement Unit to the area to identify and eradicate over 200,000 marijuana plants.

“The efforts put forth by the Coast Guard, DEA, and the Bahamian Police Force is another success story highlighting the effectiveness of OPBAT’s counter-drug operation,” said Cmdr. Mike Benson, the Coast Guard OPBAT Director.

Approximately 460,000 pounds of marijuana were destroyed.

Operation Bahamas, Turks and Caicos is an international operation between the U.S., the Bahamas, and Turks and Caicos governments to identify, disrupt and dismantle illicit smugglers transiting through the Bahamas.

Coast Guard Receives Upgraded HC-144B Aircraft in Corpus Christi, Texas

CORPUS CHRISTI, Texas – The Coast Guard received an upgraded HC-144 medium-range surveillance aircraft at Sector/Air Station Corpus Christi, Texas, Wednesday, the Coast Guard 8th District said in a Feb. 20 release.

The bravo upgrade expands the HC-144's extensive sensor capability, aiding the Coast Guard in its maritime patrol, drug and migrant interdiction, disaster response, and search and rescue missions.

The Coast Guard upgraded the HC-144 aircraft to improve mission effectiveness and situational awareness, as each newly modified aircraft features an updated cockpit control and display unit, navigation and equipment monitoring systems.

The Coast Guard is also integrating the Navy's Minotaur mission system architecture across its fixed-wing aircraft fleet. With the sophisticated command and control system, the aircraft incorporates surveillance and reconnaissance equipment to allow aircrews to gather and process surveillance information that can be transmitted to other platforms and units during flight.

"We are excited to usher in this new command and control suite to support the United States and our complex mission set," said Capt. Edward Gaynor, Sector/Air Station Corpus Christi commanding officer. "Coast Guard Sector/Air Station Corpus Christi looks forward in working with our newly upgraded HC-144 fleet to better support our partners in South Texas."

Coast Guard Cuts Ribbon on New Command Center in Maine

BOSTON – Coast Guard Sector Northern New England officially opened a new 24-hour command center Feb. 20 in South Portland, Maine, the Coast Guard 1st District said in a release of the same date.

Sen. Susan Collins, R-Maine, Atlantic Area Commander Vice Adm. Scott Buschman, and First District Commander Rear Adm. Andrew Tiongson were all on hand for the ribbon cutting ceremony. The command center is the hub for all Coast Guard operations across Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont and parts of New York.

Located at Coast Guard Base South Portland, the command center's exterior remained the same, but the interior is completely new. At approximately 1,100 square feet, the space is able to receive alerts of distress any time day or night. The updates to the command center cost nearly \$400,000 and were part of a larger \$2.3 million upgrade to the base. The command center updates included new furniture, electronics, central air conditioning, a generator, and improved Rescue 21 reliability to continue assisting mariners across the area.

Acting as central command and control for operations across four states, the command center, along with its staff and equipment, are essential to Coast Guard missions such as search and rescue, marine environmental protection and port and waterway security.

Coast Guard Cutter Dauntless Returns Home after Caribbean Patrol

NEW ORLEANS – The Coast Guard Cutter Dauntless returned home to Pensacola, Florida, after completing a 59-day patrol in the Caribbean Sea, the Coast Guard 8th District said in a Feb. 14 release.

During the patrol, Dauntless conducted joint operations with Department of Homeland Security air and surface assets to intercept over 80 migrants heading for U.S. soil, conducted four medical evacuations at sea saving nine lives, and assisted in a drug interdiction seizure.

The crew of the Dauntless supported Operation Unified Resolve, a combined effort between Joint Interagency Task Force South, Coast Guard and international partners in the Caribbean region. The emphasis of the operation focused on interdicting vessels smuggling drugs and illegal migrants to the United States, which resulted in the seizure of 640 kilograms of cocaine and detention of two smugglers as part of a joint mission effort with U.S. Customs Border Protection.

Coast Guard Interdicts 24 Migrants off Mona Island,

Puerto Rico

SAN JUAN, Puerto Rico – The crew of the Coast Guard Cutter Tahoma (WPC-908) repatriated 20 of 24 Dominican migrants to a Dominican Republic Navy vessel Feb. 11 just off Samana, Dominican Republic, following the interdiction of a makeshift boat Feb. 9, approximately five nautical miles west of Mona Island, Puerto Rico, the Coast Guard 7th District said in a Feb. 11 release.

Four men among the interdicted migrants are facing possible federal prosecution by the U.S. Attorney's Office for the District of Puerto Rico for illegally attempting to reenter the United States.

Since October 2018, Coast Guard, federal and Puerto Rico law enforcement partners have interdicted at least 969 migrants and stopped several narcotics smuggling attempts throughout the Sector San Juan area of responsibility.

“Despite challenging conditions, the Coast Guard crews involved in this event utilized their training and expertise to successfully rescue all 24 people from the unseaworthy vessel,” said Lt. Cmdr. Matthew Haddad, Sector San Juan chief of enforcement. “These illegal maritime migration voyages are extremely dangerous and put the safety of those onboard in great jeopardy. The Coast Guard, in conjunction with our partners, remain poised to intercept these smuggling events in an effort to prevent the unnecessary loss of life.”

The crew of a Coast Guard HC-144 Ocean Sentry aircraft from Air Station Miami, while on a routine patrol of the Mona Passage, detected a 22-foot makeshift wooden boat late Friday night with an undetermined number of passengers aboard transiting towards Puerto Rico. The migrants were continuously bailing out water to prevent their vessel from sinking.

The Coast Guard Cutter Joseph Tezanos (WPC-118) diverted and

interdicted the migrant vessel Saturday morning, when the crew embarked all 24 migrants, 20 men and four women, and destroyed the migrant boat as a hazard to navigation. Afterwards, the migrants were embarked aboard Coast Guard Cutter Richard Dixon (WPC-1113) and then to the Coast Guard Tahoma (WMEC-908) for their repatriation. The crew of the Tahoma completed the transfer of the four detained migrants Sunday to Border Patrol agents in Mayaguez, Puerto Rico.

Following at-sea interdictions, illegal migrants stopped are repatriated to their country of origin or returned to their place of departure. In some cases, those migrants found to have a criminal history with possible connection to smuggling operations are turned over to law enforcement authorities for further prosecution by the Department of Justice. Once aboard a Coast Guard cutter, all migrants receive food, water, shelter and basic medical attention.

The Joseph Tezanos and Richard Dixon are 154-foot fast response cutters homeported in San Juan, Puerto Rico, while the Tahoma is a 270-foot medium endurance cutter based out of Portsmouth Naval Shipyard in Kittery, Maine. The new Offshore Patrol Cutter will eventually replace Tahoma and other ships in its

class, which will be able to carry out Coast Guard missions with greater endurance and interoperability with military and federal partners.

Coast Guard Interdicts 25

Migrants Off Mona Island, Puerto Rico

SAN JUAN, Puerto Rico – The crew of the Coast Guard Cutter Joseph Napier (WPC-1115) repatriated 22 of 25 Dominican migrants to a Dominican Republic Navy vessel Feb. 4, following the interdiction of a makeshift boat Feb. 2, approximately 20 nautical miles northwest of Mona Island, Puerto Rico, the Coast Guard 7th District said in a February release.

Three of the interdicted migrants are facing possible federal prosecution by the U.S. Attorney's Office for the District of Puerto Rico for illegally attempting to re-enter the United States.

The Coast Guard and federal and Commonwealth of Puerto Rico law enforcement partners have interdicted more than 400 migrants and stopped several narcotics smuggling attempts since October of 2018.

"The migrants were attempting to make the transit across an ocean passage in a vessel that was inherently unsafe due to overloading, missing all required safety equipment, and operating without navigation lights," said Lt. John Schulz, cutter Joseph Napier commanding officer. "Many lives are lost each year by these types of ventures and are a direct threat to the people who attempt the voyage. Each person saved is a testament to how critical the Coast Guard and our partner agencies efforts are to ensuring that there is not a unnecessary loss of life in the waters surrounding Puerto Rico."

The crew of a Coast Guard HC-144 Ocean Sentry aircraft from Air Station Miami, while on a routine patrol of the Mona Passage, detected a 35-foot makeshift boat Friday night with an undetermined number of passengers aboard transiting towards

Puerto Rico.

The Coast Guard Cutter Joseph Napier was diverted and interdicted the migrant vessel Saturday morning embarking all 25 Dominican migrants, 24 men and a woman.

Following at-sea interdictions, illegal migrants that are stopped are repatriated to their country of origin or returned to their place of departure. In some cases, those migrants found to have a criminal history with possible connection to smuggling operations are turned over to law enforcement authorities for further prosecution by the Department of Justice. Once aboard a Coast Guard cutter, all migrants receive food, water, shelter and basic medical attention.

The Joseph Napier is a 154-foot fast response cutter homeported in San Juan, Puerto Rico.

Coast Guard Offloads 34,780 Pounds of Cocaine in Port Everglades



MIAMI – The crew of the Coast Guard Cutter Forward (WMEC-911) offloaded approximately 34,780 pounds of cocaine Feb. 5 in Port Everglades worth an estimated \$466 million wholesale seized in international waters in the Eastern Pacific Ocean, the Coast Guard 7th District said in a release of the same date.

The drugs were interdicted off the coasts of Mexico, Central, and South America and represent 21 separate suspected drug

smuggling vessel interdictions by the U.S. Coast Guard.

The cutter Forward was responsible for eight cases seizing an estimated 14,207 pounds of cocaine. The Coast Guard Cutter Hamilton (WMSL-753) was responsible for five cases, seizing an estimated 9,460 pounds of cocaine. The Coast Guard Cutter Campbell (WMEC-909) was responsible for four cases, seizing an estimated 6,153 pounds of cocaine. The Coast Guard Cutter Alert (WMEC-630) was responsible for two cases, seizing an estimated 5,736 pounds of cocaine. The Coast Guard Cutter Venturous (WMEC-625) was responsible for one case, seizing an estimated 1,565 pounds of cocaine. The Coast Guard Cutter Confidence (WMEC-619) was responsible for one case seizing an estimated 553 pounds of cocaine.

“The interdiction and disruption of more than 17 tons of cocaine is a result of the collaboration and coordination of multiple Coast Guard and interagency assets to address the complex maritime challenge of transnational criminal organizations,” said Cmdr. Michael Sharp, commanding officer of the cutter Forward. “I am extremely proud of all the women and men that contributed to the mission success, it is a direct reflection of how the U.S. Coast Guard delivers mission excellence anytime, anywhere.”

Numerous U.S. agencies from the Departments of Defense, Justice and Homeland Security are involved in the effort to combat transnational organized crime. The Coast Guard, Navy, Customs and Border Protection, FBI, Drug Enforcement Administration, and Immigration and Customs Enforcement along with allied and international partner agencies play a role in counter-drug operations. The fight against transnational organized crime networks in the Eastern Pacific requires unity of effort in all phases from detection, monitoring and interdictions, to prosecutions by U.S. Attorneys in Florida, California, New York, the Gulf Coast, Puerto Rico and elsewhere.

The Coast Guard increased U.S. and allied presence in the Eastern Pacific Ocean and Caribbean Basin, which are known drug transit zones off of Central and South America, as part of its Western Hemisphere Strategy. During at-sea interdictions in international waters, a suspect vessel is initially located and tracked by allied, military or law enforcement personnel. The interdictions, including the actual boarding, are led and conducted by U.S. Coast Guardsmen. The law enforcement phase of counter-smuggling operations in the Eastern Pacific are conducted under the authority of the Coast Guard 11th District headquartered in Alameda, California.

The cutter Forward is a 270-foot medium-endurance cutter homeported in Portsmouth, Virginia. The cutter Hamilton is a 418-foot national security cutter homeported in Charleston, South Carolina. The cutter Campbell is a 270-foot medium endurance cutter homeported in Portsmouth, New Hampshire. The cutter Alert is a 210-foot medium-endurance cutter homeported in Astoria, Oregon. The cutter Venturous is a 210-foot medium-endurance cutter homeported in St. Petersburg, Florida. The cutter Confidence is a 210-foot medium-endurance cutter homeported in Port Canaveral, Florida.

Coast Guard Cutter Diligence Returns Home Following Counter-Drug Interdictions

Wilmington, N.C. – The crew of Coast Guard Cutter Diligence returned to Wilmington, North Carolina, Feb. 2 following a 42-day patrol in the Caribbean, the Coast Guard 5th District said in a Feb. 3 release.

The crew of the Diligence performed counter-drug operations and participated in international engagements in support of Joint Interagency Task Force South.

In concert with JIATF South, the crew of the Diligence worked alongside interagency and international partners to prevent and respond to illegal maritime migration and narcotic smuggling from Central and South America. The crew of the Diligence facilitated the transport of six suspected drug smugglers, 1,200 pounds of marijuana and 50 kilograms of cocaine apprehended by other Coast Guard assets.

The crewmembers of the Diligence also conducted an engagement coincidental to operations with the Honduran Navy in Roatán, Honduras. The crew shared their expertise in engineering and law enforcement with the Honduran Navy.

“The crew of Diligence adapted and worked together to achieve operational success while enhancing key partnerships in Central America,” said Comdr. Robert S. Mohr, commanding officer of the Diligence. “I am extremely proud and truly impressed with the crew’s unwavering devotion to duty throughout this dynamic patrol.”

Coast Guard Cutter Diligence is a 54-year-old, 210-foot medium-endurance cutter homeported in Wilmington. The Diligence’s primary missions consist of counter-drug and migrant interdiction, federal fisheries enforcement, and search and rescue.

Coast Guard Cutter Alert

Returns Home Following Counter-Drug Patrol, \$83 Million Worth of Cocaine Seized

ASTORIA, Ore. – The crew of the Coast Guard Cutter Alert returned home Feb. 1 following a 60-day counter-drug patrol in the Eastern Pacific Ocean, seizing more than \$83 million worth of cocaine during the deployment, the Coast Guard Pacific area said in a Feb. 4 release.

The crew interdicted two suspected drug smuggling vessels, yielding more than 5,700 pounds of seized cocaine while patrolling international waters in support of Joint Interagency Task Force-South. Seven suspected drug traffickers were apprehended during the two interdictions.

The Alert crew received support from the U.S. Navy, Customs and Border Protection and Coast Guard maritime patrol aircrews, who provided the cutter with reconnaissance and over watch leading up to and during the interdictions.

“Coast Guard men and women operating under Joint Interagency Task Force-South, a U.S. Southern Command component, use military hardware and law enforcement authority to interdict smuggling vessels and bring the suspects to justice,” said Coast Guard Commandant Adm. Karl Schultz. “This disrupts key funding sources for these dangerous criminal networks and diminishes their influence in the Western Hemisphere. Aviation forces from the U.S. Navy, U.S. Air Force, U.S. Coast Guard, U.S. Customs and Border Protection, and others all support this crucial effort.”

A Coast Guard Helicopter Interdiction Tactical Squadron (HITRON) aircrew and an MH-65 dolphin helicopter from

Jacksonville, Florida, deployed aboard Alert throughout the patrol to assist the cutter's boarding teams during the interdictions. When not in pursuit of suspect vessels, the HITRON team helped qualify multiple Alert crewmembers during training evolutions launching and landing helicopters from the cutter's flight deck while underway.

Deployed since early December, Alert's crew spent the holidays at sea. Master Chief Petty Officer of the Coast Guard Jason M. Vanderhaden called the cutter to speak with crew members.

"We are fortunate to have such a high-spirited crew, happily celebrating Christmas and New Year's Eve together, at sea for 32 days between liberty stops," said Cmdr. Tobias Reid, Alert's commanding officer. "Between the holidays, two very interesting smuggling cases and our equator crossing ceremony, we had a very full and satisfying patrol. But, above all, we are thankful for the incredible generosity from the Astoria, Warrenton/Hammond and Seaside communities, who provide such tremendous support to our families while we were on patrol."

Commissioned in 1969, Alert is one of 14 remaining 210-foot reliance-class medium-endurance cutters built for the Coast Guard and one of three reliance-class cutters stationed on the West Coast. The cutter and crew perform search and rescue, living marine resource and environmental protection, and counter-drug missions throughout the Pacific Ocean from the U.S.-Canadian border to south of the Galapagos Islands. The fleet of aging medium-endurance cutters are operating beyond the original service lifespan and are becoming increasingly more expensive to maintain and operate.

The Coast Guard will be phasing out medium-endurance cutters with the addition of the 360-foot offshore patrol cutter (OPC). Acquisition of OPCs is one of the Coast Guard's highest investment priorities. The OPC will provide a capability bridge between the 418-foot national security cutter, which patrols the open ocean, and the 154-foot fast response cutter,

which serves closer to shore. The OPCs will feature state-of-the-art technology to meet the service's long-term need for cutters capable of deploying independently or as part of task groups to conduct law enforcement, search and rescue, homeland security, and defense missions. The first OPC is scheduled for delivery in 2021.

The OPC will provide the tools to effectively enforce federal laws, secure our maritime borders, disrupt transnational criminal organizations and respond to 21st century threats," said Schultz. "OPCs will be the backbone of the Coast Guard's strategy to project and maintain an offshore presence."

Coast Guard Interdicts 2 Suspected Drug Smugglers, 132 Pounds of Cocaine

MIAMI – The Coast Guard interdicted two suspected smugglers and approximately 132 pounds of cocaine Thursday 5 miles east of Haulover Inlet, Florida, the Coast Guard 7th District said in a Feb. 1 release.

The Coast Guard Cutter Paul Clark (WPC 1106) crew initially detected a westbound 35-foot pleasure craft approximately 30 miles east of Haulover Inlet.

The Paul Clark boarding team discovered a Bahamian national, hidden under a blanket, along with approximately 132 pounds of cocaine in the vessel's engine room. Initial background checks identified that the Bahamian individual has multiple previous narcotics smuggling convictions and an active United States arrest warrant.

“This successful interdiction is the result of a diligent boarding team who safely stopped two criminals seeking to bring contraband to the streets of South Florida,” said Capt. Megan Dean, commander of Coast Guard Sector Miami. “Our crews continue to maintain a constant presence and work daily with our DHS partner agencies to stop and stem this flow of illicit drugs and human smuggling that threaten our national security.”

The case was turned over to U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, Homeland Security Investigations (HSI). HSI is the principle investigative arm of the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, responsible for investigating transnational crime and threats. HSI special agents investigate, disrupt and dismantle terrorist, transnational and other criminal organizations that threaten or seek to exploit the customs and immigration laws of the United States.