

Thetis Crew Returns to Key West After 90-Day Patrol

KEY WEST, Fla. – The crew of the Coast Guard Cutter Thetis returned to its homeport after a 90-day patrol in support of Operations Southeast Watch and Unified Resolve in the Caribbean Sea in support of alien migrant interdiction operations, the 7th Coast Guard District said in a Dec. 19 release.

The Thetis crew, along with other Coast Guard units, worked alongside the Puerto Rico Joint Forces of Rapid Action to interdict and repatriate 219 migrants from the Dominican Republic and Haiti attempting to illegally enter the United States. While off the coast of Haiti, the cutter crew rescued six Jamaicans who were stranded at sea for three days with little food and water.

“The crew of the Thetis worked with the Haitian Coast Guard and National Police, the Dominican Republic Navy, the Cuban Border Guard, and the Royal Bahamas Defence Force as well as key United States agencies including the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Service, strengthening our domestic and international partnerships,” said Cmdr. Randall Chong, commanding officer of Thetis. “I’m very proud of my crew for our continued contributions to stopping the flow of illegal migrants while rescuing those without basic survival equipment who were found drifting in the ocean for several days.”

Adm. Karl Schultz, commandant of the Coast Guard and Master Chief Petty Officer Jason Vanderhaden, master chief petty officer of the Coast Guard, joined the crew for a Thanksgiving meal in Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, where they expressed gratitude for crew’s sacrifices made while underway during patrol. The commandant specially recognized several crewmembers for their commitment to excellence and for exemplifying his guiding

principles: ready, relevant and responsive.

The cutter Thetis is a 270-foot Famous-class cutter, homeported in Key West and has a crew of 100.

Coast Guard, CBIG Interdict Go-Fast, Seize \$30 Million in Cocaine

SAINT THOMAS, U.S. Virgin Islands – The crew of the Coast Guard Cutter Joseph Tezanos offloaded 2,606 pounds of cocaine and transferred custody of three suspected smugglers Dec. 14 to U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) special agents in St. Thomas U.S. Virgin Islands, the 7th Coast Guard District said in a release.

Coast Guard and Caribbean Border Interagency Group (CBIG) law enforcement authorities seized the \$30 million cocaine shipment and apprehended the suspected smugglers following the interdiction of a go-fast vessel on the morning of Dec. 11 in international waters off Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands.

This interdiction is the result of ongoing multi-agency law enforcement efforts in support of Operations Full Court Press, Operation Caribbean Guard and the Caribbean Border Interagency Group.

The suspected smugglers are facing likely federal prosecution by the U.S. Attorney's Office for the District of the U.S. Virgin Islands.

“This case was a team effort and perfect example of Caribbean

Border Interagency Group partners working in coordination with Joint Interagency Task Force-East to protect the people of Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands,” said Lt. Cmdr. Mario Gil, commanding officer of Joseph Tezanos. “This case involved a high-speed chase of over 10 hours in challenging weather conditions that was possible thanks to the tenacity and persistence of the Tezano’s crew and of our partners, who are proud to have completed the mission and prevented a large quantity of drugs from reaching the streets.”

While on a routine patrol, the crew of a HC-144 Ocean Sentry aircraft from Air Station Miami detected a suspicious go-fast vessel Dec. 10 transiting with three people onboard, approximately 65 nautical miles north of San Juan. Upon sunset, the go-fast continued to transit in the dark without the use of navigational lights.

Coast Guard watchstanders in Sector San Juan alerted CBIG partner agencies of the developing situation and diverted the Coast Guard Cutters Joseph Tezanos and Thetis to interdict the suspect vessel. The crews of two Customs and Border Protection Caribbean Air and Marine Branch maritime patrol aircrafts also responded and supported the interdiction by maintaining aerial surveillance of the go-fast.

Throughout the pursuit, the Coast Guard and CBP aircrews vectored-in Joseph Tezanos to the go-fast’s position. Once on scene, Tezanos remained in hot pursuit, as the crew launched the cutter’s Over-the-Horizon Boat IV that closed-in and interdicted the go-fast approximately 95 miles nautical miles northeast of St. Thomas.

The three suspects onboard the go-fast claimed to be Dominican Republic nationals. The Tezanos boat crew located 52 bales of suspected contraband aboard the go-fast that a field test yielded positive results for cocaine. The Tezanos crew apprehended and embarked the suspected smugglers along with the seized contraband.

The go-fast was later destroyed as a hazard to navigation.

The suspected smugglers and seized contraband were transported to Saint Thomas, U.S. Virgin Islands, where they were transferred to the custody of DEA special agents, who are leading the investigation into this case.

Hamilton Returns Home from 54-Day Counter-Drug Patrol

CHARLESTON, S.C. – The Coast Guard Cutter Hamilton crew returned to home Dec. 17 at the Federal Law Enforcement Training Center in Charleston, the 7th Coast Guard District said in a release.

Hamilton's crew spent the majority of their 54-day deployment conducting counter-drug operations in the Eastern Pacific Ocean. At the beginning of the patrol, Hamilton executed an exhaustive three-day search, along with Coast Guard aircraft, for a civilian aircraft that reportedly crashed approximately 100 miles off the coast of South Carolina.

While patrolling the drug-trafficking routes in the Eastern Pacific Ocean, Hamilton detained 21 suspected drug smugglers from five different vessels, and seized over 4.7 tons of cocaine, valued at over \$140 million bound for the shores of the United States. In addition, the cutter crossed the equator, a milestone for sailors and cuttermen alike.

Demonstrating the robust command and control capabilities of the national security cutter, Hamilton's crew temporarily assumed complete tactical control of all counter-drug operations in the Eastern Pacific Ocean and Caribbean,

coordinating tasking of all air and surface assets in the fight against transnational criminal and drug-trafficking organizations.

During the final days of the patrol, Hamilton's crew responded to report of an injured crew member from the Panamanian-flagged cargo vessel Pacific Talent in the Gulf of Mexico. Hamilton's crew supported the medical evacuation of the crew member by directing response operations, providing vital command and control, and delivering fuel to the helicopter that hoisted the crew member to safety.

Hamilton's crew visited Aruba, Panama, Costa Rica, and made two transits through the Panama Canal. In Golfito, Costa Rica, Hamilton's crew transferred four suspected drug smugglers to Costa Rica's Policia Control de Drogas following the successful interdiction of a Costa Rican-flag fishing vessel increasing the nation's partnerships in the fight against drug trafficking organizations.

Building upon that partnership, Hamilton's crew hosted Costa Rican officials aboard to discuss current and future cooperation between Costa Rica and the United States. Attendees included the U.S. Ambassador to Costa Rica, Sharon Day; U.S. Coast Guard Deputy for Operations Policy and Capabilities, Rear Adm. Meredith Austin; as well as Costa Rica's National Assembly Speaker of the House, Minister of Public Security and Commandant of the Costa Rican Coast Guard. Members of U.S. Joint Task Force-Bravo, based out of Honduras, conducted a medical readiness exercise, enhanced dialogue and reinforced the United States' commitment to Costa Rica.

"I could not be more impressed by this crew and their dedication to keeping over 4,290 kilograms of cocaine off of the streets," stated Capt. Mark Gordon, Hamilton's commanding officer. "It has been a busy two months for this ship and her crew in this constantly demanding maritime environment. We're excited to be returning to homeport for the holidays and to

prepare for our next patrol.”

Coast Guard Commandant 'Guardedly Optimistic' for Icebreaker Funding in 2019

ARLINGTON, Va. – Funding for the Coast Guard’s requirement for new icebreakers in fiscal 2019 is in peril but the Coast Guard remains confident that a conference between the House and Senate will allow the service to begin procurement.

“We’re going to be guardedly optimistic,” Adm. Karl Schultz, commandant of the Coast Guard, said Dec. 14 during the Navy League’s Special Topic Breakfast at the Ritz-Carlton Pentagon City. “We’re hoping to build out a fleet of six icebreakers [three polar security cutters and three medium icebreakers].

“We need one now,” he said, pointing out the age – 42 years – of the Coast Guard’s only operational heavy icebreaker, Polar Star, which recently began its Operation Deep Freeze journey to Antarctica.

President Donald J. Trump proposed funding of the first polar security cutter (PSC) – a name applied to the future heavy icebreaker by Schultz early in his tenure – in the 2019 Coast Guard budget, part of the budget of the Department of Homeland Security (DHS). The budget’s passage has been delayed over differences in the marked-up Senate version of the bill – which provides the funding—and the House version, which stripped funding Dec. 13 from its version of the bill.

The icebreaker is competing for funding desired by Trump for a

more extensive southern border wall in the DHS budget.

Schultz, who has seven years of experience in legislative liaison with Congress, said “I’m going to stick by my guns that I’m guardedly optimistic” for a conference report from Congress that will fund the first PSC.

He pointed out that the first PSC would replace Polar Star, which is dedicated to annual Antarctic resupply missions. The deployment of a new icebreaker to the Arctic would have to await the commissioning of a second PSC.

Schultz plans for construction of the first PSC to begin in spring 2019. He estimates the cutter would be launched in six years and operational a year later.

Coast Guard Cutter Abbie Burgess Returns After Great Lakes Patrol

BOSTON – The crew of Coast Guard Cutter Abbie Burgess returned to its homeport of Rockland, Maine, Dec. 12 after a 37-day patrol to the Great Lakes region in support of Operation Fall Retrieve.

During the patrol, Abbie Burgess’ crew assisted in efforts to remove or replace 1,219 seasonal aids to navigation in the 9th Coast Guard District area of responsibility. The crew also serviced two Canadian weather buoys.

Abbie Burgess transited through the St. Lawrence Seaway, making stops in Montreal, Buffalo, New York, and Cleveland.

“Although it was an unusually long trip for a cutter this size, I think the whole crew saw the benefits to our shipmates in District 9,” said Chief Warrant Officer Michael Bollinger, commanding officer of Abbie Burgess. “It was an amazing journey, both accomplishing the mission and growing together as a crew. The morale of the crew during the patrol was phenomenal, and the amount of support provided by everyone in District 9 was incredible.”

Abbie Burgess is a 175-foot coastal buoy tender with primary missions of maintaining aids-to-navigation and light icebreaking. It is named after a heroic lighthouse keeper from Rockland, Maine.

San Pedro-Based Cutter Returns to Homeport Following First Drug Bust

SAN PEDRO, Calif. – The crew of a San Pedro-based Coast Guard cutter returned to their homeport Dec. 8 following a two-week patrol that included the ship’s first drug bust, the 11th Coast Guard District said in a release.

The crew of the recently commissioned Cutter Forrest Rednour interdicted approximately 1,000 pounds of marijuana from a suspected smuggling vessel on Nov. 28 in international waters, approximately 30 miles south of the U.S.-Mexico maritime border.

A Customs and Border Protection (CBP) Air and Marine Operations Multi-Enforcement Aircraft spotted a northbound 25-foot cuddy cabin boat with three people aboard just before

midnight, Nov. 27. The Forrest Rednour crew arrived on scene, deployed their interceptor boat and stopped the suspect boat. The ship's law enforcement team initiated a boarding of the U.S.-registered boat and discovered more than 40 bales of marijuana.

The Forrest Rednour crew transferred the marijuana and suspects to Customs and Border Protection agents at Ballast Point.

"These cutters are designed to seamlessly integrate with multiple agency partners to successfully execute an array of missions, so it was great to see it play out flawlessly so early in the ship's time in service," said Lt. Graham Sherman, commanding officer of Forrest Rednour. "All members of the Regional Coordinating Mechanism worked well together, and it led to a successful outcome."

The Regional Coordinating Mechanism (ReCoM) is an evolution of joint operations among interagency partners. Located in San Diego, Los Angeles and San Francisco, the ReCoM partnership includes the U.S. Coast Guard, CBP's Air and Marine Operations, Office of Field Operations, U.S. Border Patrol and Immigration and Customs Enforcement's Homeland Security Investigations in cooperation with state and local law enforcement partners operating along the California coast.

Forrest Rednour was commissioned in San Pedro Nov. 8, and it is one of two new fast response cutters (FRCs) to be homeported in San Pedro. Two additional FRCs are scheduled to be homeported in San Pedro by next summer.

FRC's are 154-foot multimission ships designed to conduct drug and migrant interdictions; ports, waterways and coastal security operations; fisheries and environmental protection patrols; national defense missions; and search and rescue.

Coast Guard Continues Search for Possible Survivors of Capsized Migrant Boat

SAN JUAN, Puerto Rico – Coast Guard rescue crews continue searching Dec. 7 for possible survivors of a capsized migrant boat in waters just off Isla Saona, Dominican Republic.

So far, 21 people have been rescued, while seven others are reportedly still missing.

Coast Guard watchstanders in Sector San Juan overheard a VHF Channel 16 radio transmission at approximately 2 p.m. Dec. 6 from the commercial tanker Sea Board Ranger requesting assistance to find for persons in the water, approximately six nautical miles east of Isla Saona, Dominican Republic. The Sea Board Ranger crew further relayed that they located a capsized vessel at and safely recovered 20 migrants from the water.

Survivors reported that there were 28 people aboard the makeshift vessel. Shortly thereafter, Coast Guard Sector San Juan received a request for assistance from Dominican Republic authorities.

Coast Guard watchstanders diverted the Coast Guard Cutter Joseph Tezanos and launched an MH-65 Dolphin helicopter and an HC-144 Ocean Sentry aircraft to search for possible survivors.

The cutter Tezanos arrived on scene located and rescued a woman from the water on the afternoon of Dec. 6, while the crew of the Coast Guard helicopter also located the capsized vessel.

Coast Guard rescue crews participating in the search are the Cutters Joseph Tezanos and Winslow Griesser, MH-65 Dolphin helicopters from Air Station Borinquen, HC-144 Ocean Sentry from Air Station Miami and HH-C-130 Hercules from Air Station Clearwater, Florida.

U.S. Coast Guard, Royal Canadian Navy Offload More than 5,100 Pounds of Seized Cocaine

SAN DIEGO – U.S. Coast Guard and Royal Canadian Navy crews offloaded more than 5,100 pounds of seized cocaine on Dec. 7, worth nearly \$70 million wholesale, in San Diego following a 49-day counter-drug patrol in the Eastern Pacific aboard Her Majesty's Canadian Ship (HMCS) Edmonton with an embedded U.S. Coast Guard law enforcement detachment, the Coast Guard Pacific Area said in a release of the same date.

The cocaine was seized in international waters off the coast of Central and South America in support of Operation Carribe.

The crew of Edmonton with their embedded U.S. Coast Guard law enforcement detachment stopped two go-fast boats, resulting in the seizure of more than 3,500 pounds of cocaine worth almost \$50 million. The crews also recovered an additional 1,600 pounds of cocaine from the Eastern Pacific Ocean during the patrol.

“This ‘cycle of justice’ disrupts a ‘cycle of crime,’ which left unchecked, fuels violence and instability that corrodes

our hemisphere's social and economic fabric," said Vice Adm. Linda Fagan, U.S. Coast Guard Pacific Area commander. "I stand here today, alongside our Royal Canadian Navy partners, resolved in a shared commitment to protect those threatened by criminals and bring to justice those engaging in these nefarious acts."

The Canadian Armed Forces are an international partner in the fight against transnational crime. Canadian-U.S. crews were responsible for seizing more than 31,000 pounds of cocaine from suspected drug smugglers in the Eastern Pacific since 2015 – taking an estimated \$417 million out of the hands of the transnational organized crime networks.

Go-fast boats, traditionally open-hulled boats with multiple outboard engines, are used to outrun military and law enforcement officials. This offload showcases the variety of tactics and methods of conveyance transnational organized crime groups use to evade military and law enforcement detection.

The multinational effort to combat criminal networks in the region includes more than 19 partner nations operating with Joint Interagency Task Force South (JIATF South) a component of U.S. Southern Command. JIATF South partner nations, including Canadian forces, removed approximately 113 of the 283 tons of cocaine seized or disrupted for fiscal year 2017. JIATF South detects and monitors illicit trafficking in the air and maritime domains to facilitate international and interagency interdiction and apprehension of suspected illicit traffickers.

Operation Caribe takes place in the Eastern Pacific Ocean and the Caribbean Sea. Under this operation, Canada sends Canadian Armed Forces ships and aircraft to assist Operation Martillo. This U.S.-led effort involves multiple countries cooperating to thwart the flow of drug trafficking.

Coast Guard Cutter Alex Haley Returns After Bering Sea Patrol

JUNEAU, Alaska – The Coast Guard Cutter Alex Haley returned to homeport in Kodiak, Alaska, Dec. 6, following a 66-day multimission patrol, the 17th Coast Guard District said in a release.

Alex Haley spent the last two months patrolling the Bering Sea and the Aleutian chain. The crew conducted boarding evolutions on the Alaskan crabbing and fishing fleet, and responded to four separate search and rescue cases.

During the Alex Haley's patrol, the cutter's crew conducted 25 fisheries boarding evolutions ensuring the safety of the crews, vessels and the protection of the Bering Sea living-marine resources.

"Following a transfer season that saw a large crew turnover, this patrol provided quality training and operational opportunities across a broad spectrum of Coast Guard missions," said Cmdr. Jon Kreisler, commanding officer of Alex Haley. "We are returning from a highly productive winter season Bering Sea patrol, and I am pleased with the favorable search and rescue case outcomes because they will brighten the holiday season for those families involved."

The Alex Haley is a 282-foot medium-endurance cutter with 100 personnel assigned aboard it. The cutter steamed more than 8,735 miles throughout the last two months, traveling as far west as Adak along the Aleutian chain and as far north as St. Lawrence Island. The crew's time underway was in support of

those who make their livelihood on the Bering Sea.

United States' Lone Heavy Icebreaker Begins Antarctic Deployment

HONOLULU – The Coast Guard Cutter Polar Star arrived Dec. 4 in Pearl Harbor to make final preparations before sailing to Antarctica in support of Operation Deep Freeze 2019, the Coast Guard Pacific Area said in a release.

The 42-year-old Coast Guard cutter is the United States' only operational heavy icebreaker. The crew is scheduled to make their sixth deployment in as many years to directly support the resupply of McMurdo Station – the United States' main logistics hub on Antarctica.

Polar Star recently completed a six-month drydock period where outdated equipment was upgraded or replaced. The 399-foot icebreaker is the only ship in the United States' fleet capable of clearing a path through the Antarctic ice to escort resupply ships to McMurdo Station. The resupply ships deliver cargo and fuel to sustain year-round operations on the remote continent.

Operation Deep Freeze is a joint military service mission in support of the National Science Foundation – the lead agency for the United States Antarctic Program. Since 1955, U.S. Pacific Command has assisted in providing air and maritime support throughout the Antarctic continent. This year marks the 63rd iteration of the annual operation.

The Coast Guard has been the sole provider of the nation's polar icebreaking capability since 1965, and is seeking to increase its icebreaking fleet with six new Polar Security Cutters to ensure continued national presence and access to the Polar Regions.

While in Pearl Harbor, the Polar Star will complete a variety of maintenance and repairs and to take on provisions in preparation for the month-long transit to Antarctica.