Atlantic Commander: Industry-Government Partnership Essential to Coast Guard Innovation

U.S. Coast Guard response boat crews enforce a safety zone, April 2, 2024, after the collapse of the Francis Scott Key Bridge in Baltimore, Maryland.

By Erika Fitzpatrick, Contributor

Future innovation within the U.S. Coast Guard comes from listening to and partnering with the defense industry, Vice Admiral Kevin E. Lunday, U.S. Coast Guard Commander of the Atlantic Area and Defense Force East, said April 8 at Sea-Air-Space 2024.

“Most of the innovation, most of the great ideas – the kernel, the incubator for those – is within the defense industrial

base," he said. The Navy League's symposium, which he called the premiere industry-government event, is a "special opportunity to have a conversation and a dialogue."

In addition to supporting U.S. Combatant Commands, Lunday directs Coast Guard forces and operations involving navigable waterways east of the Rocky Mountains to the East Coast, throughout the Atlantic Ocean, and in parts of the Arctic Ocean to the Arabian Gulf.

As such, his command is involved in a range of often high-profile events and issues.

For instance, when Baltimore's Francis Scott Key bridge collapsed on March 26 within minutes of being rammed by a massive, malfunctioning container ship, Lunday directed forces there within hours for active search and rescue and follow-on recovery efforts. In cooperation with federal, state, and local partners, the USCG set up and now helps lead the Key Bridge Response Unified Command.

"While that may seem like a very unusual operation in some respects – a bridge collapse after a ship hitting it – that kind of emergency response that the Coast Guard is involved in leading is very common for what we do across the Atlantic area, across the service, every day," he said.

Other Atlantic-area USCG operations include:

- Helping prevent and prepare for maritime mass migration incidents and fighting transnational crime in the eastern Caribbean through participation in the Joint Task Force-East.

- Controlling, reducing, and preventing deaths from irregular maritime migration, particularly in stemming the flow of migrants from the economically and

politically stressed countries of Haiti and Cuba, through Homeland Security Task Force-Southeast.

- Looking into the circumstances involved in the June 2023 implosion of the Titan submersible, an ongoing review conducted by the Coast Guard Marine Board of Investigation.

Lunday credited USCG's successful involvement in these and other endeavors to long-term investments in incident command response and in technological systems that shed light on maritime migration patterns and provide other mission-critical information.

Need to Think Differently

Lunday said USCG is intently focused on readiness – how to carefully balance the readiness of the force with the demand for execution.

However, he said, new solutions are needed, and the Coast Guard looks to private industry to provide many of them.

Our leadership challenges us is to "think differently about how we conduct operations," Lunday said, "because the increased demands for services and readiness challenges are forcing us to think differently."

For instance, the Coast Guard needs effective technologies with government and mission application. These include artificial intelligence and data tools to better analyze, understand, model, and predict patterns of human behavior.

Because industry is thinking about where we need to be going, Lunday said, we should "open our mind and our ears and listen to what they're saying about how we move forward."

CMF’s Combined Task Force 150 Seizes Nearly 400 Kilograms in Illegal Narcotics in the Arabian Sea

Bags of illegal narcotics seized from a vessel are stacked on the deck of the U.S. Coast Guard Sentinel-class fast response cutter USCGC Glen Harris (WPC 1144) in the Arabian Sea, April 4. (Photo by U.S. Coast Guard)

By U.S. Naval Forces Central Command Public Affairs | April 08, 2024

MANAMA, Bahrain – A U.S. Coast Guard cutter, working in direct support of Combined Task Force (CTF) 150 of Combined Maritime Forces, seized nearly 400 kilograms of illegal drugs from a

dhow in the Arabian Sea, April 4.

Crewmembers from the Sentinel-class fast response cutter USCGC Glen Harris (WPC 1144) discovered and seized 15 kilograms of heroin and 375 kilograms of methamphetamine aboard the dhow. After weighing and documenting the haul, the crew properly disposed of the narcotics.

“This is the second major interdiction of the USCGC Glen Harris and the CTF-150 team with a combined total of 1,160 kg of drugs seized to date, denying income to criminal and terrorist organizations from the profits of illicit narcotics,” said Capt. (N) Colin Matthews, commander of CTF-150. “This exceptional multinational cooperation between our two teams is an example of the impacts we can make when we work together.”

On March 5, Glen Harris, working in support of CTF 150, seized 770 kilograms of methamphetamines from a dhow in the Arabian Sea.

Glen Harris is forward deployed to Bahrain. The fast response cutter is part of a contingent of U.S. Coast Guard ships forward-deployed to the region under Patrol Forces Southwest Asia (PATFORSWA). PATFORSWA deploys Coast Guard personnel and ships alongside U.S. and regional naval forces throughout the Middle East.

CTF 150 is one of five task forces under Combined Maritime Forces, the world’s largest international naval partnership. CTF 150’s mission is to deter and disrupt the ability of non-state actors to move weapons, drugs and other illicit substances in the Indian Ocean, the Arabian Sea and the Gulf of Oman.

Combined Maritime Forces is a 42-nation naval partnership upholding the international rules-based order by promoting security and stability across 3.2 million square miles of water encompassing some of the world’s most important shipping

lanes.

U.S. Coast Guard heavy icebreaker returns to the U.S. following completion of Antarctic mission

U.S. Coast Guard 13th District, April 4, 2024

SAN FRANCISCO – The Coast Guard Cutter Polar Star (WAGB 10) and crew returned to the United States Sunday, following a 138-day deployment to Antarctica to support Operation Deep Freeze 2024.

This deployment marks the Polar Star's 27th journey to Antarctica in support of Operation Deep Freeze, an annual joint military service mission to resupply the United States Antarctic stations, in support of the National Science Foundation (NSF) – the lead agency for the United States Antarctic Program (USAP). This year also marks the 64th iteration of the annual operation.

The Polar Star crew departed Seattle bound for Antarctica on Nov. 15, 2023, traveling more than 27,500 miles through the North Pacific, South Pacific, Indian, and Southern Oceans, as well as the Bering Sea and Gulf of Alaska, which included stops on four continents.

While en route to Antarctica, the Polar Star made three logistical stops in Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, Sydney, and Hobart, Australia. In Hobart, the cutter and crew hosted the U.S. Ambassador for Australia, Caroline Kennedy, Australian members of parliament, Australian and Tasmanian government representatives, and local industry partners.

After arriving in Antarctica, the cutter broke a 38-mile channel through fast ice up to 12 feet thick, creating a navigable route for cargo vessels to reach McMurdo Station. The Polar Star and crew executed three close-quarters ice escorts for cargo vessels through difficult ice conditions to guarantee the delivery of nine million gallons of fuel and 80 million pounds of cargo to advance scientific endeavors in the most remote region of the world. The cutter departed the Antarctic region on Feb. 14 after 51 days of operations in support of Operation Deep Freeze 2024.

On the return journey, the Polar Star evaded a severe bomb cyclone in the Southern Ocean and had stops in Auckland, New Zealand, Yokosuka, Japan, and Dutch Harbor, Alaska. The Polar Star's stop in Yokosuka consisted of a media visit and formal reception hosted aboard the cutter, where the crew conducted

professional exchanges with senior maritime representatives from the United States, Japan, Australia, and New Zealand, underscoring the importance of collaboration within the Indo-Pacific to promote security and stability across the region.

“The successful completion of this mission stands as a testament to the relentless commitment and selflessness exhibited by our crew,” said Capt. Keith Ropella, Polar Star’s commanding officer. “Despite adverse weather, difficult ice, and formidable mechanical challenges, the crew of Polar Star not only achieved their mission but did so with remarkable expertise and teamwork, proof of their devotion to duty and dedication to their shipmates.”

Operation Deep Freeze is the annual logistical support mission the Department of Defense provides to the NSF, which the USAP manages. This includes strategic and tactical inter-theater airlift and airdrop coordination, aeromedical evacuation support, search and rescue response, sealift, seaport access, bulk fuel supply, port cargo handling, and transportation requirements supporting the NSF. This unique mission demonstrates U.S. commitment to the Antarctic Treaty and scientific research programs. The Polar Star and crew contribute to this yearly effort by breaking the solid ice channel to clear the way for supply vessels.

The Polar Star is now in Vallejo, California, for phase four of its five-year Service Life Extension Project (SLEP). SLEP was awarded to Mare Island Dry Dock, LLC to recapitalize targeted systems, including the propulsion, communication, and machinery control systems, and conduct significant maintenance to extend the cutter’s service life. The Coast Guard will mitigate the risk of lost operational days due to unplanned maintenance or system failures by replacing obsolete, unsupportable, or maintenance-intensive equipment. Each phase is coordinated so that operational commitments, like Operation Deep Freeze missions in Antarctica, will still be met.

The Seattle-based Polar Star is the United States’ only asset capable of providing access to both Polar Regions. The cutter is a 399-foot heavy polar icebreaker commissioned in 1976. It weighs 13,500 tons, is 84 feet wide, and has a 34-foot draft. The six diesel and three gas turbine engines produce up to 75,000 horsepower.

Coast Guard Offloads More Than $24 Million in Illegal Narcotics Interdicted in Eastern Caribbean

Crew members from USCGC Margaret Norvell (WPC 1105) board a drug smuggling vessel carrying 30 bales of illegal narcotics approximately 190 miles south of Puerto Rico March 24, 2024. The bales weighed more than 1,850 pounds and have an estimated street value of approximately $24.3 million. (U.S. Coast Guard photo courtesy of the USCGC Margaret Norvell crew)
U.S. Coast Guard 7th District, April 5, 2024

MIAMI – The crew of Coast Guard Cutter Margaret Norvell offloaded more than 1,850 pounds of cocaine with an assessed street value of approximately $24.3 million in Miami, Friday.

The crew interdicted a low-profile go-fast vessel carrying 30 bales of the illicit narcotics and detained five suspected smugglers approximately 190 miles south of Puerto Rico.

The suspected smugglers will face prosecution in federal courts by the Department of Justice.

“I am incredibly proud of our crew,” said Lt. Cmdr. Colin

Weaver, Commanding Officer of cutter Margaret Norvell. “I am also grateful for the exceptional coordination and teamwork extending beyond our unit that contributed to this interdiction. Countering drug trafficking organizations that operate throughout the Caribbean depends upon the international and interagency partnerships that JIATF-S and Joint Task Force-East bring to the fight.”

The Margaret Norvell crew deployed with two boarding officers from Coast Guard Tactical Law Enforcement Team-South (TACLET-S) based in Opa Locka, Florida. TACLET-S is part of the Coast Guard’s deployable specialized forces program, with advanced training in high-risk interdiction operations in the maritime environment, including non-compliant vessel pursuit missions. Law enforcement detachments from TACLET-S deploy aboard Coast Guard, U.S. Navy and foreign allied ships to augment their capabilities and authorities to perform counter drug missions under U.S. law.

“Drug busts like this one by Margaret Norvell’s crew save lives by reducing the flow of harmful narcotics to the United States and disrupting the illicit maritime activity of transnational criminal organizations,” said Capt. John B. McWhite, chief of enforcement for Coast Guard District Seven. “The efforts to counter illicit smuggling in the Caribbean are truly a collaboration between the Coast Guard and our federal partners and regional allies. The Coast Guard will continue to do our part to deny drug trafficking networks access to maritime smuggling routes in support of the National Drug Control Strategy.”

Detecting and interdicting illegal drug traffickers on the high seas involves significant interagency and international coordination. The Joint Interagency Task Force South in Key West, Florida conducts the detection and monitoring of aerial and maritime transit of illegal drugs. Once interdiction becomes imminent, the law enforcement phase of the operation begins, and control of the operation shifts to the U.S. Coast

Guard throughout the interdiction and apprehension. Interdictions in the Caribbean Sea are performed by members of the U.S. Coast Guard under the authority and control of the Coast Guard's Seventh District, headquartered in Miami.

The cutter Margaret Norvell is one of 20 Sentinel-class fast response cutters homeported in the Seventh District. The FRCs are multi-mission patrol boats tasked with vital homeland security missions including drug and migrant interdiction; ports, waterways and coastal security; fisheries enforcement; search and rescue; and national defense. FRCs are named after Coast Guard enlisted heroes in service history, and the cutter's namesake, Margaret Norvell, served for 41 years with the U.S. Lighthouse Service in Louisiana from 1891 to 1932.

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New Geo-Tracking Buoys Make a Splash During Live Test Events

A MOTT buoy being prepared for a drop from an MH-60T helicopter. Photo credit: S&T.

U.S. Department of Homeland Security, April 4, 2024

New rugged buoy technologies equipped with Automatic Identification Systems aim to help the U.S. Coast Guard mark and track objects in the water.

Recent years have seen an uptick in the use of geo-tracking technology, which has become so widespread and affordable that we are able to attach small trackers to car keys or luggage to find them with our smartphones. The Science and Technology Directorate (S&T) is working with the U.S. Coast Guard (USCG) to develop buoys with improved geo-tracking technology for mission specific field use.

Instead of looking for car keys, USCG crews can use this technology to find and mark critical locations or objects in the water using buoys deployed from air or surface vessels. These could include stranded boats, contraband, or hazardous waste that are required to be reidentified after initial search and rescue or interdiction efforts are complete. The two new buoy systems, created by S&T industry partners, are moving into the final round of testing this year after

successfully completing functional tests in 2023.

Building a Better Buoy

The USCG handles thousands of cases each year, each potentially involving the deployment of numerous supporting assets necessary to complete those missions. After the initial response efforts, ocean currents and associated weather conditions can carry away watercraft or other manmade materials from the original incident site. This presents a challenge for USCG crews since those materials left behind can become navigation hazards in busy shipping lanes or involve illegal goods. During a drug interdiction, for example, suspects will often throw contraband overboard while fleeing. Determining where these illegal materials are located is an essential part of gathering evidence and protecting the nation's coasts; therefore, finding them quickly is key.

"The availability of accurate, real-time geo-position data is critical in verifying the drift and motion of items of interest and assisting in the planning of a search and rescue or other response mission," said Edwin Thiedeman of the USCG Office of C4 & Sensors Capabilities.

"S&T is working closely with the vendors, USCG subject matter experts, and operators to deliver more capable buoys to support multiple USCG missions. These new improved buoys will provide the USCG with much improved accuracy and reliability to execute their important maritime missions," stated Ron McNeal, S&T Silicon Valley Innovation Program (SVIP) transition director.

While the USCG currently has geo-tracking buoys, the existing systems do not have a secondary locator that is visible at sea level day and night in case of geo-tracking failure. The existing systems are not reusable or rechargeable, so they have to be replaced frequently, representing a significant cost and a potential loss in data. S&T's SVIP put out a call

to industry through the Maritime Object Tracking Technology (MOTT) solicitation for rugged geo-tracking buoys that could be quickly deployed from both air and surface vessels traveling at high speeds. The buoys needed to transmit Automatic Identification System (AIS) and Global Positioning System (GPS) data, which large ships use to share and receive location data while traversing the world's waterways. Having AIS/GPS capabilities built into the buoy helps ensure USCG crews would be able to quickly pick up signals using their existing communications equipment.

"The ability to link small innovative businesses directly with the government to provide new technologies to fit government needs has a wide range of benefits for all parties. With all of this in mind, MOTT's goal was to find a start-up company with a new or existing buoy system that could be tailored to the USCG's needs, resulting in more efficient technology transition and acquisition processes," said CDR Rebecca Fosha, deputy of the USCG Research, Development, Test & Evaluation and Innovation Program.

Following the solicitation's initial launch in March 2020, SVIP awarded funds to two companies: Kenautics, Inc. and Morcom International, Inc. Each business had an existing system they could adapt to the USCG's requirements: the Kenautics Global Positioning System AIS Navigation and Tracking Buoy and the Morcom Tracking Unit for Navigational Aid. Both companies reached Phase 3 of the SVIP funding lifecycle in 2023, which required functional tests in a real-world setting.

"Startups typically don't have the human or financial capital to champion large R&D projects," said Melissa Oh, SVIP managing director. "Using the SVIP phased approach, we are quickly able to assess if a technology will have the ability to respond to the given need and transition the technology to the operators on a timeline that allows smaller businesses to be competitive."

Go For Test Launch

In August and November 2023, staff from SVIP and the USCG Research, Development, Test & Evaluation and Innovation Program traveled to USCG Base Elizabeth City, North Carolina, to conduct separate test runs for each of the new MOTT buoys. The tests focused on how the buoys operated when dropped from different altitudes and velocities, which involved deploying the systems from an MH-60T helicopter and an HC-130J fixed wing aircraft traveling at various speeds and altitudes. Evaluators were interested in how the rugged designs held up upon impact, given that one version of the buoy has a parachute and the other does not.

It was also important to see whether the buoys successfully continued to function when they impacted the water, while at the same time determining whether the buoy went too deep under the surface of the water. Going too deep underwater could risk the system striking the bottom, where it might potentially get stuck or malfunction once it resurfaced. Participants conducted 10 drops over the course of four days, which provided valuable feedback on improvements that Kenautics and Morcom International can incorporate into the next version of their prototypes.

“It was important to test the buoys in a realistic, operational environment—in this case Base Elizabeth City—to evaluate the structure, functions, and software integrity. Observation from USCG personnel and the companies provided valuable feedback to modify the buoys’ performance to better fit USCG missions,” noted Jason Pharr from the Tactical/Navigation Program Office in the Engineering Support Branch of the USCG Aviation Logistics Center.

In addition to testing the buoys’ ability to withstand water impact, S&T and USCG staff also evaluated their battery life and cybersecurity. Rechargeable batteries are one of the design components that will help make the new buoys more cost

effective than current models, so it was important to see how long they could operate in an open ocean environment.

Test sessions were conducted over several flights lasting approximately two hours for each sortie, which gave a realistic scenario of how long it might take USCG crews to return to an incident site once conditions were safe. During operational deployment, the buoys utilized strobe lights, radio beacons and transmitted AIS information approximately every 10 minutes so crews could pick up the signals on both visual and radio frequency scanners. Separate from the drop tests but related to the buoys' communications capabilities, S&T also conducted Red Team testing with a third party to determine whether there were any cybersecurity issues for either system. The goal was to see whether the buoy signals could be vulnerable to detection or hacking by civilian systems, since this could represent a potential risk.

The Next Wave

Last year's Phase 3 test sessions provided critical insight into how the MOTT buoys could be improved moving forward. The next rounds of operational evaluations are scheduled to take place later in 2024. The MOTT buoy is one of S&T's joint projects between S&T and the USCG through SVIP, which also includes a Language Translation device that operates offline in a zero-connectivity environment. These systems could potentially join a growing list of solutions that empower our nation's homeland security operations while promoting more efficient technology transition-to-market.

US Coast Guard Cutter Escanaba returns home after supporting Operation Vigilant Sentry

The crew of U.S. Coast Guard Cutter Escanaba (WMEC 907) conducts small boat personnel transfers with the U.S. Coast Guard Cutter Isaac Mayo (WPC 1112), in the South Florida Straits, Feb. 26, 2024. Escanaba's crew contributed to the interdiction and repatriation of over 100 migrants from Haiti and Cuba while patrolling the Coast Guard Seventh District's area of responsibility. (U.S. Coast Guard photo by Seaman Laura Holguin-Rojas)

U.S. Coast Guard Atlantic Area, April 1, 2024

PORTSMOUTH, Va. — The crew of U.S. Coast Guard Cutter

Escanaba (WMEC 907) returned to their homeport in Portsmouth, Monday, following a 52-day patrol in the Florida Straits and Windward Passage.

Escanaba's crew contributed to the interdiction and repatriation of over 100 migrants from Haiti and Cuba while patrolling in the Coast Guard Seventh District's area of responsibility. Escanaba deployed in support of the Homeland Security Task Force – Southeast initiative Operation Vigilant Sentry (OVS), which aims to disrupt and prevent unlawful migrant flow and human trafficking.

OVS is the 2004 Department of Homeland Security plan that provides structure for deploying joint air and surface assets and personnel to respond to irregular maritime migration in the Caribbean corridor of the United States. Its primary objectives are to protect the safety of life at sea while deterring and dissuading irregular, unlawful maritime migration alongside our federal, state, and local partners.

While on patrol, Escanaba served as the Commander Task Unit for operations between the Florida Keys, Cuba, and Haiti, coordinating the employment of numerous surface and air assets to aid in deterring illegal maritime migration ventures bound for the United States.

"This is Escanaba's first patrol this year," said Cmdr. Jared Silverman, commanding officer of Escanaba. "The crew responded exceptionally to this extremely challenging mission; they handled each and every migrant with respect and care, and truly embodied the Coast Guard's humanitarian mission."

Escanaba is a 270-foot, Famous-class medium-endurance cutter. Escanaba's primary missions are counter-narcotics operations, migrant interdiction, living marine resources protection, and search and rescue in support of U.S. Coast Guard operations throughout the Western Hemisphere.

For information on how to join the U.S. Coast Guard, visit GoCoastGuard.com to learn about active duty, reserve, officer, and enlisted opportunities. Information on how to apply to the U.S. Coast Guard Academy can be found here.

US Coast Guard Cutter Hamilton completes four-month deployment, returns to homeport in Charleston

Crews from Coast Guard cutters Hamilton (WMSL 753) and Munro (WMSL 755) exchange cutter boats in the Pacific Ocean, March 12, 2024. Hamilton and Munro are national security cutters. (U.S. Coast Guard photo by Ensign Ray Corniel)

U.S. Coast Guard Atlantic Area, April 1, 2024

NORTH CHARLESTON, S.C. – The crew of the U.S. Coast Guard Cutter Hamilton (WMSL 753) returned to their homeport in North Charleston, Friday, following a four-month maritime safety and security patrol in the Western Atlantic and Eastern Pacific Ocean.

Patrolling in support of Homeland Security Task Force – Southeast's Operation Vigilant Sentry and Joint Interagency Task Force – South's (JIATF-S) counterdrug mission, Hamilton's crew interdicted four vessels trafficking illicit narcotics, apprehended 10 suspected drug smugglers, rescued 47 migrants on an unsafe voyage at sea, and assisted six mariners in distress.

While underway, Hamilton worked to counter illicit maritime activities, strengthen partner nation ties, and facilitate the safety of life at sea. Hamilton interdicted 7,448 pounds of marijuana from four drug trafficking ventures worth more than $7 million. In support of JIATF-S, Hamilton assisted Panamanian and Costa Rican partners with two additional interdictions for a combined 5,800 pounds of cocaine, worth approximately $76 million.

On Christmas Eve, Hamilton's crew spotted a U.S.-flagged sailing vessel with three people aboard, requesting assistance during rough seas. Hamilton sent over a rescue and assistance team to assist them with retrieving their adrift dinghy, restored their engines, provided medical aid, and escorted them safely back to Florida. In another case, Hamilton spotted a Panamanian fishing vessel's crew waving for help. Hamilton deployed their rescue and assistance team to evaluate the nature of their distress. Once on-scene, they found three fishermen with their vessel adrift after fighting an engine fire. Hamilton provided medical aid and water while remaining on-scene until relieved by Panamanian authorities.

“I am so proud of our crew’s flexibility, resiliency, and superb execution of duty,” said Capt. Justin Carter, commanding officer of Hamilton. “We accomplished every task asked of us, whether countering drug smugglers, responding to unsafe migrant ventures, or aiding mariners at sea. Performing these missions required expert operation and maintenance of our ship, boats, and aircraft, and our crew took care of each other through every challenge we faced.”

Hamilton also conducted at-sea trainings with Coast Guard cutters Munro (WMSL 755), Bear (WMEC 901) and an MH-65 helicopter crew from the Helicopter Interdiction Tactical Squadron.

Hamilton is one of four 418-foot National Security Cutters (NSC) homeported in Charleston. With its robust command, control, communication, computers, intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance equipment, the NSC is the most technologically advanced ship in the Coast Guard’s fleet. NSCs are a world-wide deployable asset that supports Department of Homeland Security, Department of Defense, and national objectives through drug interdiction, migrant interdiction, national defense, search and rescue, fisheries enforcement, and national intelligence collection.

For more information about Hamilton, visit https://www.atlanticarea.uscg.mil/Area-Cutters/CGCHAMILTON/.

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Joint operation leads to cocaine seizure in Bahamas

U.S. Coast Guard 7th District, March 29, 2024

MIAMI – U.S. Coast Guard Air Station Borinquen aircrews assisted the Royal Bahamas Police Force and the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration with the transfer and disposition of approximately 391 kilos of cocaine worth an estimated value of $7.5 million, Tuesday, at the Mayaguana Airport in The Bahamas.

Operation Bahamas Turks and Caicos partners collaborated to interdict the contraband.

The Royal Bahamas Police Force Drug Enforcement Unit coordinated with Mayaguana Airport Police and DEA agents to seize a suspected smuggling aircraft and discovered the contraband.

The RBPF took custody of a suspected smuggler and the RBPF public affairs and communication department reported that the case investigation is ongoing.

The drug bust follows the recent 2024 Northern Caribbean Security Summit held in The Bahamas earlier this month. The NOCSS was the third-annual meeting between executive and law enforcement leaders from the United States, The Bahamas, the Turks and Caicos Islands, and the United Kingdom. At the summit, leaders discussed ways to modernize, integrate, and position joint security relationships to confront the complex threats of the 21st century. NOCSS partners continuously work across the region to dismantle criminal networks, block malign actors, support strong judiciaries, and stop the trafficking of drugs, guns, wildlife, and people.

OPBAT is a partnership between the DEA, U.S. Coast Guard, U.S. Customs and Border Protection, the U.S. Department of State, and law enforcement entities of The Commonwealth of The Bahamas and the Turks and Caicos Islands to stop the flow of illicit narcotics through the Caribbean, destined for the United States or other jurisdictions. OPBAT assets also regularly assist with prosecuting human smuggling and search and rescue cases throughout its area of responsibility.

Unmanned Systems Help Coast Guard Members Navigate the Future

By David Santos, Coast Guard Academy External Affairs, March 27, 2024

U.S. Coast Guard leaders envision a future where Unmanned Aerial Systems (UAS) launched from Coast Guard cutters monitor air and surface contacts or fly autonomously inside large ships to inspect vessel tanks and other hazardous compartments.

Or, using sensors small enough to be installed on small UASs or Autonomous Underwater Vehicles (AUV), measure surface oil spill thickness and help direct assets to heavily impacted areas during oil spill responses.

These future scenarios are some of the strategic objectives outlined in the service’s Unmanned Systems Strategic Plan,

which was released last year.

The Coast Guard has been exploring the use of long, medium, and short range unmanned aerial systems since 2008 to provide a cost effective way to increase the operational presence of the service in an increasingly complex maritime environment.

Today cadets, faculty, and staff members at the U.S. Coast Guard Academy are taking the next step in helping to make this vision of the future a reality.

Capt. Brian Maggi and retired Capt. Daniel Burbank, faculty members from the Academy's Engineering Department, are helping to build a network of licensed drone operators. Their goal is to increase the number of Coast Guard members capable of using the technology in the fleet to help bridge the gap between the huge responsibilities the service is tasked with and the limited resources it is given.

As qualified Short Range Unmanned Aerial System (SR-UAS) Instructor Pilots, Maggi and Burbank are currently teaching a course to help a wide range of Academy personnel complete all the requirements to earn the Coast Guard SR-UAS qualification by the end of the semester.

"The initial solicitation for this course resulted in 60 cadet responses," Maggi said. "Many of our cadets are already experienced UAS pilots and know the capabilities of these systems better than we do. As Instructor Pilots, we can empower this group to help the Coast Guard innovate how UAS are integrated into operations and mission support. For the cadets and Coast Guard personnel with limited or no experience, the goal is to foster their curiosity to inspire them to grow into this community and create awareness of how these systems may be a force multiplier for all Coast Guard missions."

"It's very inspiring to see how quickly the cadets learn how

to precisely fly the drones and how to use the high resolution electro-optical and infrared imagers for target detection and identification," Burbank said. "They've got great 'stick and rudder' flying skills," he adds, "and are innovative in the ways they use the dozens of flight and imagery modes to get the most benefit from system capabilities."

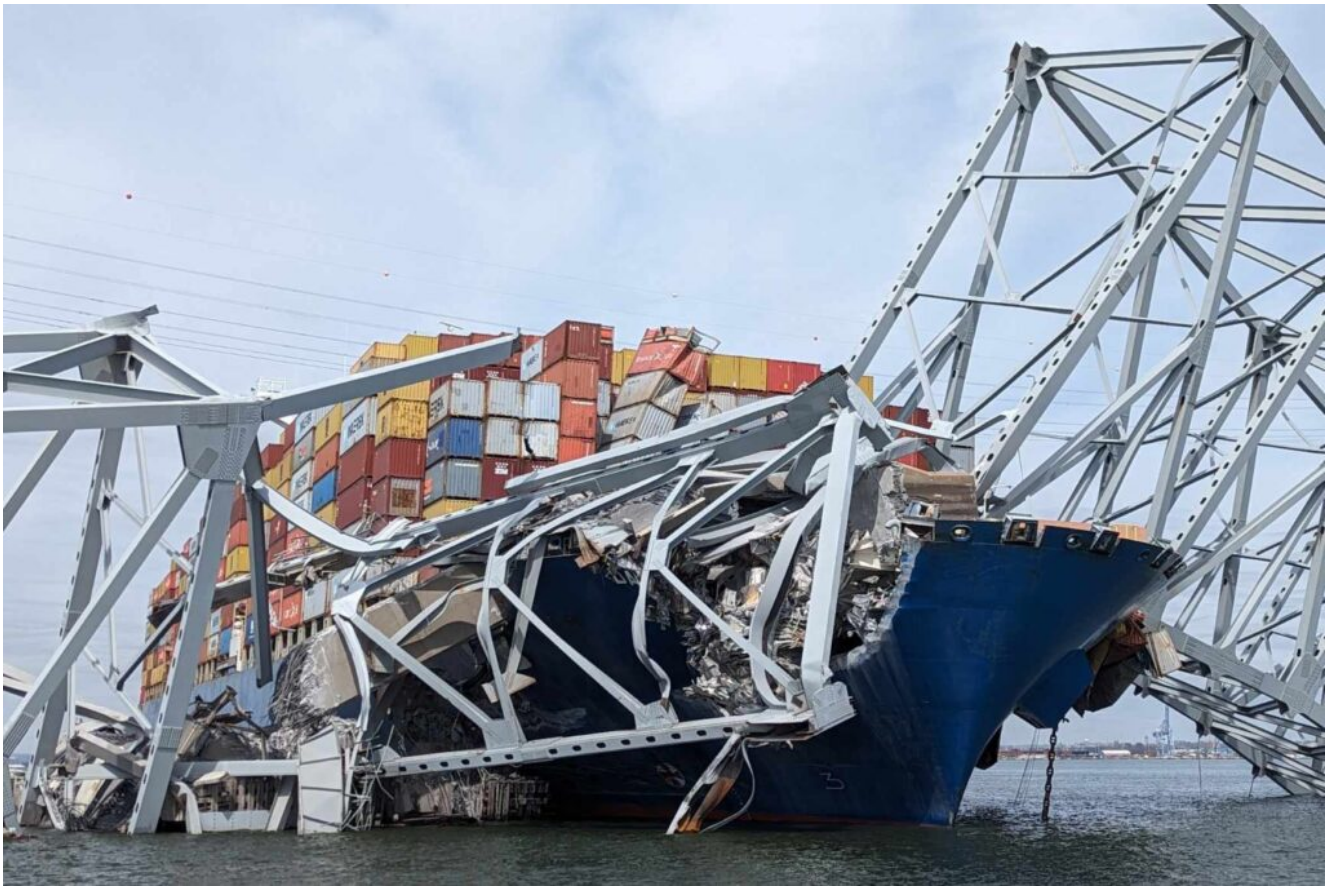
Future plans call for establishing a 3-credit course that would teach cadets how to acquire imagery and video for engineering, science, and Coast Guard mission support. From there an expansion into the Cyber Systems and Operations Research & Data Analytics majors is planned to support the use of this technology in a variety of Coast Guard missions.

"Having come from an organization where human operators routinely use robotic systems to augment and extend their reach and vision, this feels much the same," said Burbank, who completed several spaceflight missions as one of three Astronauts who have graduated from the Academy. "These systems with talented and trained humans-in-the-loop will make the Coast Guard much more effective just as they do NASA."

As our maritime infrastructure and environment becomes more complex, Coast Guard personnel will be ready to employ unmanned systems to advance the safety and security of U.S. ports and waterways.

Unified Command, Joint Information Center

Established for Key Bridge Response 2024



BALTIMORE – A Unified Command and Joint Information Center have been established in Baltimore Wednesday to coordinate response and disseminate information for the Francis Scott Key Bridge collapse on Tuesday morning.

The Key Bridge Response 2024 Unified Command includes the:

- U.S. Coast Guard
- Maryland Department of the Environment
- Maryland Transportation Authority
- Maryland State Police
- Synergy Marine

A website with incident response information can be found at the following URL:

https://www.keybridgeresponse2024.com

The media is requested to call the Joint Information Center at 410-631-8939 for interview response inquiries and interviews.

The Unified Command’s operational priorities are ensuring the safety of the public and first responders, accountability of missing persons, protecting the environment, incident stabilization, safely restoring transportation infrastructure and commerce, and supporting the investigation.