

# Coast Guard Cutters Conclude Operation Aiga in Oceania



The crews of the Coast Guard Cutters Juniper and Joseph

Gerczak return to Honolulu after completing a 42-day patrol in Oceania in support of Operation Aiga, March 7. *U.S. COAST GUARD*

HONOLULU – The crews of the Coast Guard Cutters Juniper and Joseph Gerczak returned to Honolulu March 7 after completing a 42-day patrol in Oceania in support of Operation Aiga, the Coast Guard 14th District said March 11.

Both crews deployed on a combined 14,000-mile patrol to provide maritime support and patrol coverage for Samoa and American Samoa's exclusive economic zones as well as conducted joint-training operations with the armed forces in French Polynesia.

Operation Aiga, the Samoan word for family, is designed to integrate Coast Guard capabilities and operations with Pacific Island County partners to effectively and efficiently protect shared international interests, combat illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing and strengthen maritime governance in Oceania.

"The Coast Guard remains committed to combating IUU fishing as fish stocks remain a critical component to maritime sovereignty and resource security for many nations, especially those in the Pacific," said Cmdr. Jeff Bryant, chief of enforcement for Coast Guard District Fourteen. "The Juniper and Joseph Gerczak were able to establish stability for our partners on the high seas and while patrolling their EEZs in support of Operation Aiga."

While underway, both cutters conducted hoist training with French Dauphin N3 helicopter crews designed to increase interoperability on the high seas. Additionally, both cutter commanding officers met with Rear Adm. Jean-Matthieu Rey, commander of armed forces in French Polynesia, in Tahiti to discuss the importance of regional maritime security partnerships to maintain a free and open Indo-Pacific.

"We had the privilege to integrate our capabilities and

strengthen existing partnerships with the French, while protecting global resources on the high seas and exclusive economic zones of our regional partners,” said Cmdr. Christopher Jasnoch, commanding officer of the Juniper. “I am extremely proud of the crew of Juniper for their hard work preparing for this patrol, resiliency in overcoming the challenges of COVID-19 and their dedication to protecting national interests in Oceania while modeling professional maritime behavior to our partners and competitors.”

Additionally, the Juniper and Joseph Gerczak crews helped fill an operational presence, conducting security patrols in Samoa’s EEZ throughout the month of February to protect fisheries and other natural resources while Samoa’s Nafanua II patrol boat was down.

The Joseph Gerczak made an inaugural visit in Pape’ete, Tahiti, marking the first time a Coast Guard fast response cutter conducted vital port calls on the island.

“Although Coast Guard missions, new cutters, and adventure make serving afloat attractive, the top incentive remains having the opportunity to serve alongside the most talented and humble men and women our country has to offer,” said Lt. Joseph Blinsky, commanding officer of the Joseph Gerczak. “Without the skill and hard work from Joseph Gerczak’s crew, our more than 2,300 NM transit to Tahiti from Honolulu would not have been possible. Coupled with first-class support from District 14, Sector Honolulu, and Juniper, made executing this expeditionary patrol a reality.”

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# Cutter Steadfast Returns Home Following Migrant- Interdiction, Counter- Narcotics Patrol



The Coast Guard Cutter Steadfast crew conducts cutter boat pursuit training with a crew from the Coast Guard Cutter Forrest Rednour on Feb. 8. *U.S. COAST GUARD*

ASTORIA, Oregon. – The Coast Guard Cutter Steadfast (WMEC 623) and crew returned to the cutter's homeport in Astoria March 7 after a 48-day patrol of the California coast, the cutter's crew said in a release.

The 54-year-old cutter and crew conducted drug and migrant interdiction, living marine resource protection and search and rescue operations along the U.S.-Mexico maritime border.

The Steadfast crew coordinated with Customs and Border

Protection, Coast Guard aircraft and Mexican Navy vessels to interdict three boats suspected of attempting to illegally transport migrants into the United States, resulting in the safe recovery and repatriation of 75 people.

Additionally, the crew boarded 23 U.S. vessels operating in the area and participated in a multi-asset search operation following a flare sighting.

“This was a challenging yet successful patrol for the crew of Steadfast, highlighting the important interagency effort required to secure our maritime borders,” said Cmdr. Craig Allen, commanding officer of the Steadfast. “It was rewarding to work alongside our many partners during the patrol, including Customs and Border Protection, U.S. Border Patrol, and both Mexican and U.S. Navy assets.”

The Steadfast’s permanent crew makeup is 63 enlisted personnel and 12 officers. To aid in this patrol, the permanent party welcomed multiple temporary duty members from across the nation, including: Petty Officer 1st Class Bradley Kwasny and Petty Officer 2nd Class Christian Matranca, both from Maritime Safety and Security Team San Francisco; Petty Officer 2nd Class Aaron Holroyd from Training Center Yorktown, Virginia; and Lt. Ryan Guinee from the Surface Forces Logistic Center – Patrol Boat Product Line in Seattle.

“We had a top-notch team on this patrol, and I’m especially proud of them for overcoming some difficult equipment casualties that were necessary to keep the 54-year-old cutter mission capable,” Allen said. “The crew achieved noteworthy results due to superb skill and professionalism. We’re also thankful to the men and women at Coast Guard Sector Los Angeles for the excellent support they provided during multiple port visits.”

Commissioned in 1968, the Steadfast is a 210-foot Reliance-class medium-endurance cutter homeported in Astoria and



routinely deploys in support of counter-drug, migrant interdiction, fisheries, and search and rescue and homeland security missions.

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## Coast Guard, Partner Agencies Respond to Haitian Migration Venture off Florida Keys



Coast Guard, Customs and Border Protection and partner agencies crews respond to a suspected Haitian migrant venture, March 6, approximately 200 yards off Ocean Reef, Florida. The vessel grounded Sunday with no injuries reported. *U.S. COAST GUARD*

MIAMI – U.S. Coast Guard, Customs and Border Protection and partner agencies responded to a grounded Haitian vessel on March 6, approximately 200 yards off Ocean Reef in Key Largo, Florida, the Coast Guard 7th District said March 7.

Coast Guard, CBP and partner agencies rescued 356 Haitians from the vessel and no injuries were reported. A good Samaritan notified Coast Guard Sector Key West watchstanders March 6, at approximately 1 p.m., of a blue Haitian vessel grounded off Ocean Reef.

“We worked seamlessly with our state and federal partners to safely remove all the persons from this vessel.” said Capt. Jeffrey Randall, chief of Staff, Coast Guard 7th District. “The Coast Guard and partner agencies are continuously patrolling the Mona Passage, Windward Passage, Caribbean Sea and the approaches to the United States to stop these dangerous and unsafe voyages.”

“The coordinated and timely response of the U.S. Border Patrol and our federal, state, and local partners potentially saved the lives of these migrants today,” said Walter N. Slosar, chief patrol agent, U.S. Border Patrol, Miami Sector.

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## **Coast Guard Cutter Midgett Returns Home from 3-Month Alaskan Patrol**



The U.S. Coast Guard Cutter Midgett (WMSL 757) moors at its new homeport at Base Honolulu Aug. 16, 2019. *U.S. COAST GUARD / Chief Petty Officer Sherri Eng*

KODIAK, Alaska – The crew of Coast Guard Cutter Midgett returned to homeport in Honolulu, Hawaii, Friday after a three-month long Bering Sea patrol, the Coast Guard 14<sup>th</sup> District said March 4.

The crew of the Midgett enforced federal laws and regulations in the U.S. Exclusive Economic Zone near Alaska's Aleutian Islands chain.

They played a strategic role in protecting the nation's critical marine resources, enforcing fisheries and safety regulations, and were forward positioned to safeguard the U.S. commercial fishing fleet.

The crew of the Midgett also acted as a search and rescue platform while providing support to helicopter crews operating out of Dutch Harbor and Cold Bay, Alaska. This increased operational range for the aircrews and provided them with fuel



for high-endurance missions.

The crew also conducted training and emergency response drills.

“Navigating Alaskan waters was extremely exciting and rewarding,” said the Midgett’s commanding officer, Capt. Willie Carmichael. “I’m proud and impressed by my crew’s service and commitment to promote safety and security in Alaskan fisheries that are so vital to the U.S. economy.”

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## Coast Guard Academy Cadets Prepare to Join the Fleet



Cadets from the Class of 2022 at the U.S. Coast Guard Academy receive their first duty assignments during Billet Night,

March 3, 2022. *U.S. Coast Guard / Petty Officer 3rd Class Matthew Abban*

NEW LONDON, Conn. – Cadets from the Class of 2022 received their first duty assignments during Billet Night at the U.S. Coast Guard Academy, March 3, the Academy said.

One of the most anticipated events of the 200-week cadet program, Billet Night is a night of energy and excitement as the cadets are less than three months away from commencement when they commission as officers in the U.S. Coast Guard on May 18, 2022.

This year's class is made up of 257 cadets, including nine international cadets. After graduation, more than 200 newly commissioned officers will report to cutters as near as Coast Guard Cutter Eagle homeported near the Academy in New London, Connecticut, to the Coast Guard Cutter Sequoia, homeported nearly 8,000 miles away in Apra Harbor, Guam.

Twenty others will report to flight school in Pensacola, Florida, to begin pilot training before reporting to Coast Guard Air Stations across the country.

Cadets will engage in a variety of Coast Guard operations at their new units upon graduation. Coast Guard units throughout the nation routinely conduct domestic missions as well as joint exercises with partner nations in which the Coast Guard assists fellow coast guards and navies to adapt or expand their maritime security capabilities.

The remaining graduates will report to various shore units, including the first graduates of the Academy's Cyber Systems program. The newly established Cyber Systems degree provides graduates with the skills and ability to defend cyberspace, enable operations, and protect critical maritime infrastructure.

The Coast Guard protects America's vast Maritime Transportation System as a ready, relevant, and responsive

force engaging in defense operations, maritime law enforcement, search and rescue, marine safety, and environmental protection operations.

“Every day our graduates are leading vital missions across the globe,” said Rear Adm. Bill Kelly, Coast Guard Academy superintendent. “I’m excited that the members of the class of 2022 will soon take their places in the Coast Guard fleet and join our service’s efforts to address the nation’s complex maritime challenges.”

Founded in 1876, the Coast Guard Academy is one of the five U.S. service academies that emphasizes leadership, physical fitness and professional development leading to a guaranteed job upon graduation as a commissioned officer in the U.S. Coast Guard.

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## **Coast Guard Cutter Polar Star Reaches Southernmost Navigable Waters on Earth**



U.S. Coast Guard Cutter Polar Star (WAGB 10) transits away from the ice shelf near the Bay of Whales, Antarctica, Feb. 17. Polar Star navigated to the Southernmost navigable seas and entered uncharted waters, reaching the edge of the ice shelf. *U.S. COAST GUARD / Petty Officer 3rd Class Diolanda Caballero*

MCMURDO STATION, Antarctica – The U.S. Coast Guard Cutter Polar Star (WAGB 10) reached the southernmost navigable waters on the planet Feb. 17 while underway in the Bay of Whales, Antarctica, the Coast Guard Pacific Area said March 1.

Polar Star reached a position of 78 degrees, 44 minutes, 1.32 seconds south latitude at 12:55 p.m. New Zealand time, holding a distance of approximately 500 yards from the edge of the Ross Ice Shelf, further south than the current Guinness World Record holder.

While underway, Polar Star sailed in waters previously charted as part of the ice shelf that are now navigable waters. Today, portions of the Ross Ice Shelf deviate approximately 12 nautical miles from the positions depicted on official



charts.

During Polar Star's transit to and from the Bay of Whales, Polar Star surveyed 396 nautical miles of the ice shelf for potential future navigational use.

Crewmembers aboard the cutter are working with the staff at Guinness World Records to officially become the new record holders.

On Feb. 7, 1997, U.S. Coast Guard Cutter Polar Sea (WAGB 11), Polar Star's sister ship, reached 78 degrees, 29 minutes south latitude.

In 1908, Ernest Shackleton gave the Bay of Whales its name during the Nimrod Expedition on the basis of the numerous whales he and his crew sighted. Three years later, Roald Amundsen established a base camp in the bay, from which he set out on his successful endeavor to become the first person to reach the South Pole. Years later, U.S. Navy Rear Adm. Richard E. Byrd established Little America in the Bay of Whales during his first, second, and third Antarctic Expeditions, exploring more than 60% of the Antarctic continent.

"The crew of Polar Star is proud to follow in the footsteps of legendary Antarctic explorers like Shackleton, Amundsen, and Byrd," said Capt. William Woityra, commanding officer of Polar Star. "Even today, more than a century later, we carry on that legacy of exploration, reaching new places, and expanding human understanding of our planet."

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# Cutter Diligence Returns to Homeport after 60-Day Eastern Pacific Ocean Patrol



The crew of the U.S. Coast Guard Cutter Diligence, shown conducting small boat training in the Eastern Pacific Ocean. *COAST GUARD / BM3 Cayne Wattigney*

PENSACOLA, Fla. – The crew of Coast Guard Cutter Diligence returned to their homeport of Pensacola, Florida, Feb. 20 following a 60-day counter-drug patrol in Eastern Pacific Ocean, the Coast Guard 8th District said Feb. 25.

Partnering with three other Coast Guard cutters, Diligence interdicted three suspected drug-smuggling vessels resulting in the apprehension of 12 detainees and the interdiction of more than 4,321 pounds of cocaine with a street value of approximately \$82 million.

“Diligence’s crew demonstrated professionalism, resilience and perseverance while conducting complex high-speed boat pursuits in the drug transit zone,” said Cmdr. Jared Trusz, Diligence’s commanding officer. “I am honored to serve with and proud of the crew’s superlative efforts that directly support the United States national security interests.”

Numerous U.S. agencies from the Departments of Defense, Justice and Homeland Security cooperated 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 drug cartels in the Eastern Pacific Ocean requires unity of effort in all phases from detection, monitoring and interdictions, to criminal prosecutions by international partners and U.S. Attorneys’ Offices in districts across the nation. The law enforcement phase of counter-smuggling operations in the Eastern Pacific Ocean is conducted under the authority of the Coast Guard 11th District, headquartered in Alameda, California. The interdictions, including the actual boardings, are led and conducted by members of the U.S. Coast Guard.

The Diligence is a 210-foot medium-endurance cutter homeported in Pensacola with 78 crewmembers. The cutter’s primary missions are counter-drug operations, migrant interdiction, enforcing federal fishery laws and search and rescue in support of Coast Guard operations throughout the Western Hemisphere.

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# **U.S. Coast Guard Patrols EEZ in Partnership With Samoa**





Crews from the U.S. Coast Guard Cutter Juniper (WLB 201) and USCGC Joseph Gerczak (WPC 1126) conducted security patrol operations in Samoa's exclusive economic zone throughout February 2022, to protect fisheries and other natural

resources. *U.S. COAST GUARD*

HONOLULU – Working with the government of Samoa, crews from the U.S. Coast Guard Cutter Juniper (WLB 201) and USCGC Joseph Gerczak (WPC 1126) conducted security patrol operations in Samoa's exclusive economic zone throughout February 2022, to protect fisheries and other natural resources, the Coast Guard 14th District said Feb. 28.

The Juniper and Joseph Gerczak crews helped fill the operational presence needed to deter illegal, unreported, and unregulated fishing while Samoa's Nafanua II patrol boat is down.

"We always look forward to assisting our partners in the region," said Cmdr. Jeff Bryant, the 14th District's chief of enforcement. "The United States offered to assist the government of Samoa by providing security and sovereignty operations in Samoan waters due to the absence of their patrol boat."

The cutters have been underway in Oceania supporting Operation Aiga, designed to integrate Coast Guard capabilities and operations with the United States' Pacific Island Country partners to effectively and efficiently protect shared national interests, combat IUU fishing and strengthen maritime governance on the high seas.

As a trusted partner in the Pacific, the Coast Guard employs 11 bilateral shiprider agreements with Pacific Island Forum nations, like Samoa, to support resource security and fisheries enforcement. These agreements enabled the Coast Guard to aid host-nation sovereignty while patrolling Samoa's EEZ.

The United States Coast Guard and the government of Samoa have a history of partnership. In 2019, the Coast Guard cutters Walnut and Joseph Gerczak visited Apia Harbor and conducted

patrol operations with officials from Samoa's Ministry of Police and Ministry of Fisheries on board. In 2021, the crew of the Oliver Berry conducted similar patrols while Samoa's patrol boat underwent repairs.

"Operation Aiga is named that for a reason. Aiga means family in Samoan and that's how we view our Pacific neighbors," says U.S. Ambassador to Samoa Tom Udall. "This is real partnership. Together we can stop those who seek to steal valuable resources that simply don't belong to them."

With a population of approximately 40 million people covering an area of 3.3 million square miles, Oceania is regularly patrolled by the Coast Guard and its international partners to protect and support those who call it home.

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## **Coast Guard Creates Cyber Mission Specialist Rating**



Coast Guard Capt. Samson Stevens shows an aerial view of the Port of Virginia during the Cyber Component Commanders' Conference aboard Coast Guard Base Portsmouth, Virginia, March 6, 2020. The service has now created a cyber mission specialist rating. *U.S. COAST GUARD / Seaman Katlin Kilroy* ARLINGTON, Va. – The Coast Guard commandant has announced the creation of a cyber mission specialist rating and corresponding chief warrant officer specialty to increase the focus and professionalism of the service's cyber capabilities.

Commandant Adm. Karl Schultz made the announcement during his Feb. 24 annual "State of the Coast Guard Address" before an audience at Coast Guard Air Station Clearwater, Florida.

In a Feb. 25 message to the Coast Guard, Shultz further amplified the announcement, saying, "Cyberspace is an operational domain continuously evolving while growing in importance and complexity. Operations in cyberspace require a professional and skilled workforce [military and civilian]. Competition to recruit, retain, and grow cyber talent is constant. A dedicated CMS enlisted rating with accessions beginning at the E-5 paygrade, as is done with the diver



rating and an accompanying CYBR [cyber] specialty, will best provide a trained, proficient, and professional workforce to enable and conduct cyberspace operations.

“Members of the CMS rating and CYBR specialty will have the opportunity to serve in a broad range of missions,” he said. “The Coast Guard’s cyber program plays a critical role operating a secure cyberspace for the Service, protecting the Marine Transportation System against malicious actors seeking to identify new ways to exploit cyberspace, and countering adversaries’ intent on disrupting Coast Guard operations or negatively impacting national interests. Members of the CMS rating and CYBR specialty will continue to serve in critical positions within [Coast Guard] Cyber Command, U.S. Cyber Command, DHS Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency areas, districts and sectors and elsewhere as required.

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## **Commandant Names Future Polar Security Cutter ‘Polar Sentinel’**



The Coast Guard Cutter Polar Star (WAGB 10) transits in the Chukchi Sea, Dec. 19, 2020. The first future polar security cutter will be named Polar Sentinel. *U.S. COAST GUARD / Lt. Jared Payne*

ARLINGTON, Va. – The commandant of the Coast Guard used the occasion of his annual “State of the Coast Guard” address to announce the name of the first future polar security cutter.

“Today, I am excited to name the first polar security cutter; that name will be Polar Sentinel,” said Commandant Adm. Karl Schultz, speaking Feb. 24 before an audience at Coast Guard Air Station Clearwater in Florida.

The name is in keeping with the Coast Guard’s earlier class of polar icebreakers, one of which – the Polar Star – is the only operational heavy icebreaker in the U.S. military services and is badly in need of replacement. The first PSC is expected to be delivered by Halter Marine in 2025. Halter Marine also is under contract for a second PSC.

“Detailed work remains underway in preparation for construction of our first polar security cutter,” Schultz said. “That will be a state-of-the-art ship requiring exacting designs, complex steel work and systems integration. ... When

our fleet of polar security cutters becomes operational, the work of these uniquely capable assets will be essential to protecting our economic, our environmental and our national security interests in what we call the high latitude regions.”

The commandant said the Our Coast Guard “is amidst [its] largest shipbuilding effort since the Second World War as we build the fleet that will serve the nation for decades to come.”

He said the the 10th national security cutter to be named for the first master chief petty officer of the Coast Guard, the Charles Calhoun, will be christened in June.

He also noted the first offshore patrol cutter, the Argus, is more than 60% complete and the second OPC, the Chase, is “well on its way.”

Shultz said the Coast Guard anticipates “awarding the largest acquisition contract in the history of our service for the next 11 offshore patrol cutter hulls” this spring.

The newly competed OPC contract award follows the earlier OPC contract award to Eastern Shipbuilding Group for the first nine OPCs. The Coast Guard plans to procure a total of 25 OPCs, which will replace 28 medium-endurance cutters, some of which are more than 50 years old.

“That legacy fleet [of medium-endurance cutters] loses nearly 500 patrol days on an annual basis due to unplanned maintenance and repairs,” the admiral said, noting that if all those days were lost from counter-narcotics patrols, it would result in 44,000 pounds of illegal drugs that could have been interdicted from reaching the United States.

Shultz also said the service is making progress on the acquisition of 30 waterways commerce cutters, noting that “these new tenders will have greater endurance, speed and

deck-load capacity to efficiently maintain 28,000 aids to navigation, marking over 12,000 miles of navigable inland waterways. These aids to navigation are a critical component of our marine transportation system, upon which cargoes and commodities comprising 25% of our nation's gross domestic product move annually.

"For the first time in history, our inland fleet will be able to accommodate mixed-gender crews, providing all enlisted members of our service these unique afloat experiences," he said.