

USCGC Vigilant Assists in Interdicting 1,200 Pounds of Cocaine during Caribbean Deployment



March 4, 2024

CAPE CANAVERAL, Fla. – The crew of the U.S. Coast Guard Cutter Vigilant (WMEC 617) returned home to Cape Canaveral, Sunday, following a 60-day patrol in the Central and Eastern Caribbean.

Deploying in support of Joint Interagency Task Force-South, Vigilant worked alongside other Coast Guard cutters, Department of Defense and Department of Homeland Security

units, and international partners to conduct maritime safety and security missions. Vigilant deterred illegal drug smuggling and directly contributed to U.S. Coast Guard and national objectives to combat transnational criminal organizations.

During the patrol, Vigilant's crew responded to a distress signal from a French-flagged sailing vessel. The signal came from two French crew members who were stranded at sea for over eight days with no means of propulsion and no remaining drinking water. Vigilant was first on scene and provided them with water, shelter, and medical aid until their safe return home was coordinated.

Additionally, Vigilant assisted USS Leyte Gulf (CG 55) in stopping a drug trafficking venture, detaining six suspected drug traffickers, and interdicting 1,200 pounds of cocaine worth an estimated \$15.7 million.

In addition, Vigilant conducted a professional exchange with officials in St. Lucia as well as St. Kitts and Nevis. Vigilant worked to promote regional stability, security and strengthen partnerships. Members of the crew also conducted a community relations project in Basseterre, St. Kitts, where they joined members of the St. Kitts and Nevis Defence Force to paint two classrooms at a local school.

"As always, I couldn't be prouder of our crew and our continued heritage of service," said Cmdr. Jon Potterton, the commanding officer of Vigilant. "We enjoyed a great patrol where we were able to save lives and gain a greater appreciation for our Eastern Caribbean partner nation's cultures and strengthen bonds through training and volunteerism."

Vigilant is a 210-foot Reliance-class medium endurance cutter. The cutter's primary missions are counter drug operations, migrant interdiction, enforcement of federal fishery laws and

search and rescue in support of U.S. Coast Guard operations. The medium endurance cutter is under the command of the U.S. Coast Guard Atlantic Area. Based in Portsmouth, Virginia, U.S. Coast Guard Atlantic Area oversees all Coast Guard operations east of the Rocky Mountains to the Arabian Gulf. In addition to surge operations, Atlantic Area also allocates ships to deploy to the Caribbean and Eastern Pacific to combat transnational organized crime and illicit maritime activity.

Coast Guard Cutter Alert Returns Home to Astoria for the Last Time



By U.S. Coast Guard Pacific Area, Feb. 26, 2024

ASTORIA, Ore. – The U.S. Coast Guard Cutter Alert (WMEC 630) and its crew returned to their homeport, Monday, after a 59-day counter-narcotics patrol in the Eastern Pacific Ocean.

This patrol is scheduled to be the cutter's last patrol out of its current homeport of Astoria, Oregon.

During the patrol, the Alert's embarked helicopter crew from, the Helicopter Interdiction Tactical Squadron (HITRON), based out of Jacksonville, Florida, sighted a suspected "go-fast" vessel driving on a northerly course and alerted the cutters crew. The crew responded and launched both of its small-boat pursuit teams. Due to the vessel's refusal to stop when ordered, the HITRON helicopter disabled the engines of the "go-fast" and monitored until the pursuit crew gained control of the vessel. Simultaneously, the second small boat team recovered dozens of bales of cocaine jettisoned into the ocean by the suspected smugglers. The crew then worked tirelessly through the night to haul in and account for all 4,950 kg of cocaine, valued at more than \$143 million.

The interdiction is among the Coast Guard's largest single interdictions in the Eastern Pacific and represents a major blow to the criminal organizations attempting to smuggle illicit narcotics through the maritime domain. Additionally, it serves as the capstone in Alert's time in Coast Guard Pacific Area, as the cutter will shift homeport in June to be stationed in Cape Canaveral, Florida as part of the larger Coast Guard Force Alignment Initiative.

"The crew worked in the margins, and we won big in the margins," said Cmdr. Lee Crusius, commanding officer Coast Guard Cutter Alert. "The return on investment from the Coast Guard to the American people continues to be demonstrated by our ability to project capabilities and rule of law within the maritime domain. Day in and day out, the women and men of our service are doing important business, protecting vital international interests from those who wish to subvert order."

The smuggling of cocaine represents a large threat to not only the health of nations and rule of law, but destruction of fragile ecosystems in its manufacturing and movement.

The cutter Alert was commissioned in 1969 and is the newest of three 210-foot Reliance-class Medium Endurance cutters stationed on the West Coast. It performs a variety of missions to protect Americans and American interests in the Northern and Eastern Pacific Ocean.

U.S. Coast Guard Cutter Polar Star completes Operation Deep Freeze 2024 mission, departs Antarctica



Feb. 23, 2024

SOUTHERN OCEAN – The U.S. Coast Guard Cutter Polar Star (WAGB 10) and crew departed McMurdo Station, Antarctica, Feb. 12, after operating for 51 days below the Antarctic Circle in support of Operation Deep Freeze 2024.

The Polar Star and crew broke a 38-mile channel through fast ice to create a navigable route for vessels to reach McMurdo Station and escorted a cargo vessel and oil tanker through the ice to and from the station.

“This year, the fast ice in McMurdo Sound was exceptionally thick due to the winds and temperature at the end of last season” said Lt. Cmdr. Don Rudnickas, operations officer. “It challenged our ship and our crew in almost every way, but we met those challenges to achieve our ultimate concern – the resupply of McMurdo Station by sea.”

Before departing the Antarctic Region, the cutter also visited the Bay of Whales, where members from all three of the Coast

Guard Regional Dive Lockers dove 90 miles south of the previously documented record for southernmost scuba dive. The crew also went ashore adjacent to the Ross Ice Shelf in the Bay of Whales where they conducted their Antarctica Service Medal ceremony and were able to walk up to the ice shelf.

“Operation Deep Freeze demands more than just breaking ice; it requires navigating the complexities of keeping a 48-year-old cutter operational while subjecting her to the most extreme conditions possible,” said Capt. Keith Ropella, commanding officer. “We rely on the crew’s technical expertise, teamwork, and their commitment to overcoming the relentless obstacles posed by time and nature. It’s also the collaboration of a Joint Task Force, comprised of servicemembers from the U.S. Air Force, Army, and Navy, that play a crucial role in mission success.”

Operation Deep Freeze is the annual logistical support mission provided by the Department of Defense to the National Science Foundation (NSF) managed by the U.S. Antarctic Program (USAP). This includes coordination of strategic inter-theater airlift, tactical intra-theater airlift and airdrop, aeromedical evacuation support, search and rescue response, sealift, seaport access, bulk fuel supply, port cargo handling, and transportation requirements supporting the NSF. This is a unique mission demonstrating U.S. commitment to the Antarctic Treaty and to research programs conducted for the betterment of all humanity. The Polar Star and crew contribute to this yearly effort through icebreaking to clear the channel for supply vessels.

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

US Coast Guard Cutter Thetis Disrupts Illegal Narcotics Trafficking During Caribbean Deployment



Feb. 23, 2024

KEY WEST, Fla. – The crew of the U.S. Coast Guard Cutter Thetis (WMEC 910) returned to their homeport in Key West on Friday following a 62-day patrol in the Central Caribbean Sea.

Thetis worked in support of the Joint Interagency Task Force-South alongside partners to deter illegal narcotics trafficking in the Central Caribbean. With an embarked MH-65

Dolphin helicopter crew from the Coast Guard Helicopter Interdiction Tactical Squadron and support from the USS Farragut (DDG 99), Thetis interdicted approximately 2,646 pounds of cocaine with an estimated street value of \$34.8 million.

Thetis pursued two cases while patrolling the region and conducted law enforcement operations through close coordination with multiple maritime patrol aircraft and other Coast Guard assets. With the Farragut, Thetis interdicted more than 2,094 pounds of cocaine.

In another case, Thetis interdicted a go-fast vessel, resulting in the detainment of two suspected narcotics traffickers and the seizure of 441 pounds of cocaine.

“The cases we encountered on this patrol emphasize the importance of collaboration across departments and agencies in deterring the flow of illegal narcotics into the United States,” said Master Chief Petty Officer AJ Gibson, the command chief of Thetis. “I am extremely proud of the adaptability and determination displayed by our crew in successfully completing the mission.”

Thetis is a 270-foot Famous-class medium-endurance cutter with a crew of 100. Their 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.

CENTCOM Intercepts Iranian

Weapons Shipment Intended for Houthis



Military-grade weapons and other lethal supplies are stacked on the deck of a vessel seized by the U.S. Coast Guard Sentinel-class fast-response cutter USCGC Clarence Sutphin Jr. (WPC 1147) in the Arabian Sea, Jan. 28. Clarence Sutphin Jr. operates in the U.S. 5th Fleet area of operations to help ensure maritime security and stability in the Middle East region. **(Photo by U.S Coast Guard)**

By U.S. Central Command Public Affairs | February 15, 2024

TAMPA, Fla. – A U.S. Coast Guard cutter, forward deployed to the U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM) area of responsibility, seized advanced conventional weapons and other lethal aid originating in Iran and bound to Houthi-controlled areas of Yemen from a vessel in the Arabian Sea on Jan. 28.

The U.S. Coast Guard Sentinel-class fast-response cutter USCGC Clarence Sutphin Jr. (WPC 1147), assigned to U.S. Naval Forces Central Command, located the vessel and boarded it in the Arabian Sea. The boarding team discovered over 200 packages

that contained medium-range ballistic missile components, explosives, unmanned underwater/surface vehicle (UUV/USV) components, military-grade communication and network equipment, anti-tank guided missile launcher assemblies, and other military components.

The direct or indirect supply, sale or transfer of such aid violates U.N. Security Council Resolution 2216 (as extended and renewed by resolutions 2675 and 2707).

“This is yet another example of Iran’s malign activity in the region, ” said Gen. Michael Erik Kurilla, CENTCOM commander. “Their continued supply of advanced conventional weapons to the Houthis is in direct violation of international law and continues to undermine the safety of international shipping and the free flow of commerce.”

CENTCOM is committed to working with our allies and partners to counter the flow of Iranian lethal aid in the region by all lawful means including U.S. and U.N. sanctions and through interdictions.

Coast Guard Cutter Tampa returns home after 77-day patrol in the Florida Straits



Feb. 13, 2024

PORTSMOUTH, Va. – U.S. Coast Guard Cutter Tampa (WMEC 902) and crew returned home Tuesday, following a 77-day maritime safety and security patrol in the Florida Straits.

Tampa deployed in support of Homeland Security Task Force – Southeast (HSTF-SE) and Operation Vigilant Sentry (OVS), patrolling within the Coast Guard Seventh District's area of responsibility. While underway, Tampa's crew performed as Commander Task Unit (CTU) for operations in and around the Florida Straits, coordinating with other Coast Guard units to detect, deter, and intercept unsafe and illegal maritime migration ventures bound for the United States.

While at sea, Tampa's crew interdicted one vessel with two Cuban migrants aboard, attempting to reach the U.S. through dangerous and unlawful channels. In total, Tampa's crew also contributed to the interdiction of 207 migrants throughout the patrol.

While deployed, the crew also celebrated the cutter's 40th birthday. Tampa commissioned on Dec. 12, 1982.

“CGC Tampa has gracefully completed a multitude of missions throughout her 40 years of service,” said Cmdr. Walter Krolman, commanding officer of Tampa. “From mass migration rescues to participating in multi-nation military exercises and conducting counterdrug operations, Tampa continues to prove her motto, “Thy way is the sea, thy path in the great waters.”

HSTF-SE serves as the DHS lead for operational and tactical planning, command and control, and as a standing organization to deter, mitigate and respond to maritime mass migration in the Caribbean Sea and the Florida Straits. HSTF-SE continues enhanced enforcement efforts in support of OVS, the 2004 DHS-developed plan to respond to irregular maritime migration in the Caribbean Sea and the Florida Straits.

Tampa is a 270-foot, Famous-class medium endurance cutter. The cutter’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 www.GoCoastGuard.com to learn more about active duty and reserve, officer and enlisted opportunities. Information on how to apply to the U.S. Coast Guard Academy can be found [here](#).

Coast Guard Cutter Willow crew returns to homeport

after 32-day patrol in Caribbean Sea



Feb. 13, 2024

CHARLESTON, S.C. – The Coast Guard Cutter Willow (WLB 202) crew returned to their homeport in Charleston, Saturday, after a 32-day patrol throughout the Caribbean Sea.

The Willow crew serviced 37 aids to navigation in Puerto Rico and the US Virgin Islands.

Working alongside the Coast Guard Research and Development (R&D) Center, the Willow crew installed a prototype buoy to replace Bahia de San Juan Lighted Buoy 2, which has historically been reported off station or missing due to the significant weather it encounters. Mariners utilize buoys to identify the best water for their vessels transiting into San

Juan Harbor. The Sealite Trident 2600 buoy hull is a lightweight, non-ferrous hull made of recyclable plastic material. This plastic hull has been tested for heavy weather by the R&D Center and was moored in Bahia de San Juan, Jan. 16, 2024. The deployment of a prototype buoy is part of ongoing Coast Guard-wide field research into the next generation of aids to navigation (ATON) and mooring designs to support future decisions on the most cost-efficient ATON buoy inventory.

Additionally, Willow crew members worked with Aids to Navigation Team (ANT) Puerto Rico and Coast Guard Regional Dive Locker East to recover two wayward buoy hulls and one sunken buoy hull. Two wayward buoy hulls were in areas too shallow for Willow to operate in, so smaller craft from ANT Puerto Rico and divers from the Regional Dive locker were able to recover the two buoys from critical marine areas and complete an at-sea delivery to Willow. Removing these buoys is important as it eliminates hazards of navigation, prevents deterioration of the marine environment, and allows for the refurbishment and recapitalization of the buoy.

“We always look forward to our deployments to Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands to ensure the proper maintenance of the maritime transportation system,” said Cmdr. Erin Chlum, Willow’s commanding officer. “The positive relationships we have with the local Coast Guard units and the pilot associations throughout the region allow us to address any concerns or discrepancies as soon as possible.”

Willow conducted a port call in Frederiksted, St. Croix, U.S. Virgin Islands, where the crew offered public tours and brought in more than 300 visitors, educating the community on the Coast Guard’s role in maintaining the maritime transportation system and search and rescue. Willow crew members also participated in a beach cleanup on the island, helping to remove 50 pounds of trash.

“The officers and crew of Coast Guard Cutter Willow greatly appreciate the warm welcome and hospitality we received on the beautiful island of St. Croix,” said Chlum. “I would like to thank everyone who came to the public tours of the cutter at the Frederiksted Pier. It was an amazing opportunity to hear directly from the people we serve when conducting our primary mission of maintaining the buoys of the U.S. Virgin Islands.”

Willow is a 225-foot Juniper class sea-going buoy tender. The tender crew is responsible for servicing 246 aids to navigation in South Carolina, Georgia, and throughout the Caribbean, including Cuba, Haiti, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands. The Willow crew conducts law enforcement, search and rescue, and marine environmental protection missions.

Coast Guard Cutter Dependable returns home after 59-day patrol in the Florida Straits and Windward Passage



Feb. 10, 2024

Coast Guard Cutter Dependable returns home after 59-day patrol in the Florida Straits and Windward Passage

VIRGINIA BEACH, Va. – The crew of Coast Guard Cutter Dependable (WMEC 626) returned to their home port in Virginia Beach, Saturday, following a 59-day maritime safety and security patrol in the Florida Straits and Windward Passage.

Dependable and crew members deployed in support of Homeland Security Task Force-Southeast (HSTF-SE) and Operation Vigilant Sentry (OVS) while patrolling in the Coast Guard Seventh District's area of operations. Dependable's crew conducted illegal migration deterrence and interdiction operations while collaborating with other Coast Guard and interagency assets across the region to protect life at sea and secure U.S. maritime borders.

While underway in the Florida Straits and Windward Passage, Dependable worked with additional law enforcement entities, including U.S. Customs and Border Protection and the Haitian Coast Guard Commission, to detect, deter, and intercept unsafe

and illegal migrant ventures bound for the United States. During the patrol, Dependable located and deterred four unlawful voyages with approximately 100 migrants on board. In addition, Dependable's crew rescued 33 people aboard a 25-foot vessel in distress 6 miles off Haiti's coast during heavy seas. Crew members conducted the search and rescue mission in 8-to-12-foot seas and winds gusting to 46 mph, saving all on board.

"Over the last two months, the crew of the Dependable have executed all assigned missions with dedication, skill, and initiative," said Cmdr. Kristopher Ensley, commanding officer of Dependable. "Most notably, there are 33 people still alive today because of our crew and the way they courageously braved 12-foot seas, 40-knot winds, and limited visibility to execute this critical rescue. I could not be more proud of this team; they have truly lived up to our ship's motto: 'Count on Us!'"

Established in 2003, HSTF-SE is the Department of Homeland Security-led interagency task force charged with directing operational and tactical planning, command and control, and functions as a standing organization to deter, mitigate, and respond to maritime mass migration in the Caribbean Sea and Florida Straits.

OVS is the 2004 DHS plan that provides the 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 life at sea while deterring and dissuading mass maritime migration alongside our federal, state, and local partners.

Dependable is a 210-foot, Reliance-class medium endurance cutter with a crew of 76. Since commissioning in 1968, Dependable has executed counterdrug and migrant interdiction operations, enforced federal fishery laws, and conducted

search and rescue missions in support of Coast Guard operations throughout the Western Hemisphere.

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

Coast Guard Cutter Resolute Returns Home, Offloads \$55M Worth of Drugs in Tampa Bay



ST. PETERSBURG, Florida – Coast Guard Cutter Resolute (WMEC 620) and crew returned from a 60-day counterdrug patrol and

offloaded approximately \$55 million worth of illicit narcotics, Monday, in St. Petersburg.

Patrolling in support of Joint Interagency Task Force - South, the Resolute crew stopped two suspected drug trafficking ventures, preventing 6,565 pounds of marijuana and approximately 3,700 pounds of cocaine from entering the United States, and detained six suspected traffickers. The drugs were seized in the international waters of the Eastern Pacific Ocean.

Supporting the Resolute was an embarked MH-65 Dolphin helicopter and crew from the Coast Guard Helicopter Interdiction Tactical Squadron, and a law enforcement detachment from Tactical Law Enforcement Team - South.

During the patrol, Resolute's crew met with Panama's National Aeronaval Service to strengthen the partnership between the United States and Panama, and discuss strategies to combat illegal, unreported, and unregulated fishing.

"The pride and dedication of Resolute's crew was evident throughout the entirety of our patrol," said Cmdr. Matthew R. Kolodica, commanding officer of Resolute. "Despite being deployed throughout the holiday season, the crew served with professionalism. The result of their collected effort was an extremely successful patrol which kept \$55 million dollars of drugs from reaching its intended destination. Every Resolute sailor and their loved ones should be proud; they are a living example of the Coast Guard's motto, "Semper Paratus – Always Ready." It is an honor to lead such a fine ship and crew."

The fight against drug cartels in the Eastern Pacific Ocean and the Caribbean Sea requires a unity of effort in all phases, from detection and monitoring to interdiction and apprehension, through criminal prosecutions by international partners and U.S. Attorneys' Offices in districts across the nation. Joint Interagency Task Force – South in Key West,

Florida conducts the detection and monitoring of aerial and maritime transit of illegal drugs. 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, and the law enforcement phase of operations in the Caribbean is conducted under the authority of the [Coast Guard 7th District](#), headquartered in Miami. The interdictions, including the actual boardings, are led and conducted by members of the U.S. Coast Guard.

These interdictions relate to Organized Crime Drug Enforcement Task Forces (OCDETF) designated investigations. OCDETF identifies, disrupts, and dismantles the highest-level criminal organizations that threaten the United States using a prosecutor-led, intelligence-driven, multi-agency approach. Additional information about the OCDETF program can be found at <https://www.justice.gov/OCDETF>.

Resolute is a 210-foot, Reliance-class medium endurance cutter homeported in St. Petersburg with a crew of 80. The cutter's primary missions include law enforcement, search and rescue, protection of living marine resources, homeland security and defense operations, international training and humanitarian operations throughout the Western hemisphere.

**U.S Coast Guard Cutter
Steadfast decommissioned
after 56 years of service**



Feb. 6, 2024

ASTORIA, Ore. – The Coast Guard decommissioned the U.S. Coast Guard Cutter Steadfast (WMEC 623) during a ceremony, Thursday, Feb. 1, 2024, in Astoria.

Rear Adm. Brendan McPherson, deputy commander, Coast Guard Pacific Area, presided over the ceremony honoring the 56 years of service Steadfast and its crews provided to the nation.

Commissioned in 1968, Steadfast was one of 16 Reliance-class medium endurance cutters built for search and rescue, counter-narcotic operations, and migrant interdiction.

“The cutter Steadfast has been a stalwart ship for the Coast Guard, frequently conducting lifesaving missions, contributing to our national security and protecting our Marine Transportation System.” said McPherson. “I am immensely proud of Steadfast’s crew for their dedication to duty while enhancing our nation’s maritime safety and security throughout the Pacific Ocean.”

During the cutter’s most [recent deployment](#), the crew transited

11,742 nautical miles on a 64-day multi-mission deployment, from Oregon to several hundred miles off the coast of Central Mexico conducting training, law enforcement, recruiting and public affairs missions, along with helicopter operations.

“Steadfast has an incredible legacy of honorable service to our nation,” said Cmdr. Brock Eckel, Steadfast’s commanding officer. “I am grateful to have had the opportunity to lead such an amazing crew through dynamic patrols and high-risk counter-narcotics operations. I want to thank the crew for their dedication, camaraderie, and desire to serve our country; they are what make this ship so special.”

As part of the U.S. Coast Guard’s [Foreign Military Sales Program](#), Steadfast will transfer to Baltimore where she will be available for transfer to another country as an Excess Defense Article.

Steadfast was one of the Coast Guard’s 13 remaining 210-foot, Reliance-class medium endurance cutters. As part of the Coast Guard’s [acquisition](#) program, the 360-foot [Heritage-class](#) offshore patrol cutters and the 154-foot fast response cutters will replace the Coast Guard’s 270-foot and 210-foot medium endurance cutters. The offshore patrol cutters will provide the majority of offshore presence for the Coast Guard’s cutter fleet, bridging the capabilities of the 418-foot national security cutters, which patrol the open ocean, and the 154-foot fast response cutters, which serve closer to shore