# Navy Orders Fourth Lot of TH-73A Thrasher Training Helicopters



ARLINGTON, Va.—The U.S. Navy has exercised a contract option to order a fourth lot of Leonardo TH-73A Thrasher training helicopters.

Leonardo said in a Dec. 24 release that it was awarded a \$110 million firm, fixed-price contract modification through AgustaWestland Philadelphia Corp. for 26 TH-73As. The option will bring the total number of TH-73As ordered to 130, the Navy's program of record requirement.

The Navy previously ordered three lots of Thrashers: 32 for \$176 million in January 2020; 36 for \$171 million in November 2020; and 36 for \$159.4 million in December 2021. The first order included "spares, support, dedicated equipment and specific pilot/maintenance training services," Leonardo said.

The TH-73As are replacing the Navy's three-decade-old TH-57B/C Sea Ranger training helicopters in Training Air Wing Five at Naval Air Station Whiting Field, Florida. The helicopters are used to train rotary-wing pilots for the Navy, Marine Corps and Coast Guard. The Thrasher will enable the services to meet advanced rotary wing and intermediate tilt-rotor training requirements.

The TH-73A will develop pilot training and skills by using current cockpit technologies and a modernized training curriculum "that reflect the capabilities in the current Navy, Marine Corps and Coast Guard inventory," the Navy said. "Using a skills-based approach to training with just-in-time methodology, incorporating modern technology, the TH-73A will ensure rotary wing aviators are produced at a higher quality, more efficiently, ready to meet the challenges faced in the fleet."

The first twelve rotary wing students began training on the TH-73A in September 2022. The first of those students completed an inaugural solo flight in November 2022.

The helicopters will be built in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, with an expected work completion date of December 2024.

# U.S. Navy Approves Full-Rate Production for Sikorsky

## CH-53K Helicopter



Stratford, Conn. – The U.S. Navy declared full rate production of the Sikorsky CH-53K helicopter, a decision that is expected to increase production to more than 20 helicopters annually in the coming years, Lockheed Martin said in a Dec. 2 release. Sikorsky, a Lockheed Martin company, is procuring long-lead items and critical materials to support building full rate production CH-53K helicopters in its digital factory.

"Ramping up production of the most technologically advanced helicopter in the world allows the U.S. Marine Corps to build out its CH-53K King Stallion fleet and support mission success," said Bill Falk, director of the Sikorsky CH-53K program. "This production authorization stabilizes Sikorsky's domestic supply chain and is a testament to our enduring partnership with the Marine Corps."

This full-rate production decision instills confidence in the diverse network of more than 200 CH-53K suppliers across 34

states. The Marine Corps' commitment to the CH-53K will allow suppliers to purchase in bulk, creating efficiencies and driving down overall costs for the U.S. military and international allies.

The Marine Corps' approved acquisition objective is 200 aircraft.

The U.S. Marine Corps declared Initial Operational Capability (IOC) for the CH-53K helicopter in April 2022, validating the platform's operational readiness to forward deploy Marines and equipment across the globe.

The CH-53K is a multi-mission helicopter with heavy-lift capabilities that exceed all other U.S. Department of Defense rotary wing aircraft and is the only heavy-lift helicopter that will remain in production through 2032 and beyond. The CH-53K can carry a 27,000-pound external load over 110 nautical miles in high/hot conditions, which is more than triple the external load carrying capacity of the legacy CH-53E aircraft.

The CH-53K King Stallion is designed to conduct expeditionary assault transport of armored vehicles, equipment, and personnel to support distributed operations deep inland from a sea-based center of operations, critical in the Indo-Pacific region. The CH-53K is a digitally designed, market available aircraft, enabling a range of operations such as humanitarian relief, firefighting and search and rescue.

### NSW Forces Wrap Up SOF

## Engagement with Indian Navy Marine Commandos



GOA, India — Naval Special Warfare forces deployed to U.S. Special Operations Command Pacific concluded a joint combined training exercise with the Indian Navy Marine Commando Force on Dec. 22, said Petty Officer 1st Class Alex Smedegard in a Dec. 22 release.

The three-week exchange built upon the two forces' collective maritime capabilities and long-standing relationship.

"We are committed to operationalizing the U.S.-India partnership through enhanced information sharing, regional security cooperation, integrated deterrence and cooperation in new domains," said the senior team leader of the U.S. Naval Special Warfare unit. "This exercise provides us the opportunity of a common understanding of a shared working environment at sea through practical hands-on scenarios as a combined team."

The exercise included tactical training with weapons, closequarter combat drills, military free fall evolutions, helicopter insertions, and maritime boat operations.

"We started off doing subject matter expert exchanges and familiarizing with standard procedures," said the U.S. team lead. "And through this development with the [Indian Navy Marine Commando Force], we were able to cultivate and execute real-world scenarios towards the latter half of the exercise."

The realistic scenarios served as a capstone to the training and included maritime interdiction operations, visit, board, search and seizure operations, and direct-action missions.

U.S. special operations forces provide flexible response to contingencies in the Indo-Pacific. Integral to this capability is a forward-deployed posture and continuous engagement with partner and ally forces, heightening mutual interoperability and regional expertise.

"We consistently look for opportunities to enhance this ongoing professional partnership," said Rear Adm. Jeromy Williams, commander of U.S. Special Operations Command Pacific. "The U.S.-India defense partnership is critical to securing a free and open Indo-Pacific."

India, the U.S., Australia, and Japan concluded naval exercise Malabar 2022 Nov. 15, a multi-national exercise designed to advance the collective planning, integration and employment of advanced warfare tactics between participating nations.

As part of Malabar 2022, there was a special operations forces-specific tri-lateral exercise between U.S. Naval Special Warfare, Indian Navy Marine Commando Force and Japan Maritime Self Defense Force Special Boarding Unit, focusing on maritime interdiction and tactical combat casualty care training.

# Navy Successfully Demonstrated Unmanned Cargo Delivery Systems for Ship at Sea



PATUXENT RIVER, Md. – The Naval Air Warfare Center Aircraft Division (NAWCAD) recently demonstrated multiple unmanned systems in a first-of-its-kind mission to move supplies to ships at sea without the use of manned aircraft during an event at Naval Air Station Patuxent River in St. Inigoes, Maryland, the Naval Air Warfare Center said in a Dec. 21 release.

The demo, held in collaboration with the <u>Small Tactical</u> <u>Unmanned Aircraft Systems program</u> (PMA-263), employed unmanned vehicles to transport cargo weighing less than 50 pounds, which accounts for 90% of Navy logistics deliveries.

"We are seeing an increase in manned and unmanned logistics,"

said Col. Victor Argobright, PMA-263 program manager. "For the Marine Corps, the Commandant is enthusiastic about where we are going with unmanned logistics, and is beginning conversations about operations and contested environments. The Navy is currently identifying areas where unmanned logistics would be a critical enabler to operations at sea, and the Blue Water Maritime Logistics UAS is a great demonstration of this emerging requirement."

During the event, industry partners Skyways Air Transportation, Inc., and Martin UAV operated their unmanned systems through long-range flights from ship-to-ship, ship-toshore, and shore-to-ship situations, carrying a variety of objects to mimic critical supplies. Both systems successfully delivered cargo over 200 nautical miles onto a moving ship underway.

"[For the future], we are looking at continued long-term experimentation, how the fleet operates, and how we get the technology out to our Sailors," said Tony Schmidt, NAWCAD's Experimentation Office director.

The unmanned systems under consideration are capable of vertical take-off-and-landing to operate from most naval ships at sea and stations ashore, as well as systems that do not require dedicated launch and recovery equipment.

NAWCAD acquired the <u>original Blue Water UAS prototype</u> in 2019 to demonstrate long-range unmanned naval ship-to-ship and ship-to-shore cargo transport. Navy test pilots and engineers have since worked with industry partners to <u>develop a system</u> that best meets maritime requirements.

To view a video of the demonstrations, go to https://youtu.be/YazljfUCMs0

# USS Paul Ignatius Completes First Forward-Deployed Naval Forces-Europe Patrol



ROTA, Spain — The Arleigh Burke-class guided-missile destroyer USS Paul Ignatius (DDG 117) returned to Rota, Spain, Dec. 20, marking the completion of her first Forward-Deployed Naval Forces-Europe (FDNF-E) patrol in the U.S. Sixth Fleet area of operations, Lt. j.g. Andrew Halus, USS Paul Ignatius Public Affairs, said in a Dec. 20 release.

After commissioning in 2019, Paul Ignatius served three years in Mayport, Fla., before shifting homeports to Naval Station Rota, Spain, as part of the phased rotation of forwarddeployed surface units assigned to Commander, Task Force 65/Destroyer Squadron 60.

The ship began its inaugural Sixth Fleet patrol in August, operating in the Arctic Ocean, Baltic Sea, and North Sea, providing theater antisubmarine warfare, air and missile defense, surface warfare, and expeditionary warfare capabilities to regional Allies and partners.

"I couldn't be more proud of this crew," said Cmdr. Corry Lougee, executive officer of Paul Ignatius. "We have been operational since February, and this ship continues to excel. Our Sailors executed the most successful homeport change to date, fought through the adversity of patrol, and now return to our new homeport stronger than ever. The mental toughness of this crew is beyond words and we are so appreciative of the overwhelming support from our families, the base, Destroyer Squadron 60, and the amazing Spanish people of Rota."

In the Baltic Sea, Paul Ignatius integrated with the Kearsarge Amphibious Readiness Group and Marines from the 22nd Marine Expeditionary Unit, under the command of Amphibious Squadron Six and Task Force 61 Naval Amphibious Forces Europe/2d Marine Expeditionary Brigade (TF-61/2). The ship and her crew provided persistent presence in the Baltic, demonstrating solidarity with Baltic Sea Allies and partners. This involved frequent interoperability opportunities with NATO Allied Maritime Command (MARCOM)'s Standing NATO Maritime Group (SNMG) 1.

In November, Paul Ignatius participated in the Royal Navy's Flag Officer Sea Training (FOST) alongside Royal Danish Navy Iver Huitfeldt-class frigate HDMS Niels Juel (F363), Royal Navy Type 23 frigate HMS Northumberland (F238), and German Navy Baden-Württemberg-class frigate FGS Sachsen-Anhalt (F224).

In the challenging December weather conditions of the Baltic Sea, the crew participated in the Finnish Navy Command-led exercise "Freezing Winds," enhancing integration and interoperability with Finland. Freezing Winds involved units and personnel from 12 countries, including Finland, Sweden, the United States, and SNMG 1. The exercise highlighted joint maritime operations with both naval and amphibious aspects, testing allied and partner nations' interoperability and proficiency through a variety of warfare areas.

The crew enjoyed port calls in Tallinn, Estonia; Riga, Latvia; Gdańsk and Gdynia, Poland; Plymouth, England; Helsinki, Finland; and Kiel, Germany during the patrol. In every port, they conducted personal exchanges and key leader engagements with host nation personnel, bolstering relationships and bonds at all levels to strengthen and develop operational effectives with Allies.

"The crew of Paul Ignatius has demonstrated time and again during this patrol that the U.S. Navy will sail, fly and fight in any conditions as we stand unified with partners and allies," said Cmdr. Aaron Arky, Paul Ignatius' commanding officer. "The ship and our embarked helicopters from HSM-79 have embodied NATO's slogan that we are stronger together. Our nation's dedication to the security of the Baltic region and Europe as a whole was on full display as we operated in the Baltic Sea and the North Sea this year."

Four U.S. Navy destroyers, including Paul Ignatius, are based in Rota, Spain and are assigned to Commander, Task Force 65 in support of NATO's Integrated Air Missile Defense architecture. These FDNF-E ships have the flexibility to operate throughout the waters of Europe and Africa, from the Cape of Good Hope to the Arctic Circle, demonstrating their mastery of the maritime domain.

# SECNAV Names Future Oceanographic Survey Ship USNS Robert Ballard



Military Sealift Command oceanographic survey ship USNS Pathfinder. U.S. NAVY WASHINGTON – Secretary of the Navy (SECNAV) Carlos Del Toro announced Dec. 21 that a future Pathfinder-class oceanographic survey ship will be named USNS Robert Ballard (T-AGS 67).

The future USNS Robert Ballard will honor Dr. Robert Ballard, a retired U.S. Navy commander, and former director of the Center for Ocean Exploration. A tenured professor of oceanography at the University of Rhode Island's Graduate School of Oceanography, he is widely known as a discoverer of the final resting place of the R.M.S. Titanic. The name selection follows the tradition of naming survey ships after explorers, oceanographers and distinguished marine surveyors.

"Dr. Ballard's career, explorations, research and focus on teaching the next generation of oceanographers is remarkable, and I am pleased to name T-AGS 67 in his honor," said Del Toro. "One of my enduring priorities is building a culture of warfighting excellence, and that includes lifelong learning amongst DoN personnel. The name Robert Ballard displayed across the stern of this ship will serve as an inspiration to all who see it while highlighting the results of commitment to education and exploration."

Ballard was born in 1942, growing up in San Diego, Calif. After he graduated from the University of California, Santa Barbara, in 1965, he earned an Army Reserve Commission, ultimately requesting and transferring to the U. S. Navy when called to active service in 1967. Assigned to the Office of a liaison officer at Woods Naval Research as Hole Oceanographic Institution in Massachusetts, Ballard worked extensively with deep-submergence vehicle Alvin (DSV-2). After transitioning to the Naval Reserve in 1970, he completed a Ph.D. in marine geology and geophysics at the University of Rhode Island. He continued to work at Woods Hole, where he was part of a team that discovered deep-sea thermal vents near the Galapagos Rift. Best known for his 1985 discovery of R.M.S. Titanic at a depth of 12,000 feet, Ballard also led other shipwreck discoveries, including USS Yorktown (CV-5), USS Quincy (CA-39) and President John F Kennedy's PT-109. Ballard retired from U.S. Naval Service in 1995. In 1989, he founded the distance learning program the JASON Project, which reached 12 million school children; and the Institute for Exploration in Mystic, Conn, and is also the founder and president of the Ocean Exploration Trust.

"I am humbled to have the U.S. Navy's oceanographic ship, USNS Robert Ballard (T-AGS 67) as a namesake. As a 17-year-old, in 1959, I went on my very first oceanographic cruise, and very early in my oceanographic career, the U.S. Navy placed a central role and continues to do so to this day," said Dr. Robert Ballard. "It is indeed an honor to know that the USNS Robert Ballard will continue to explore the oceans long after I am gone."

Secretary Del Toro has designated Mrs. Barbara Earle Ballard, Dr. Ballard's spouse and president of Odyssey Enterprises, as the ship's sponsor.

Military Sealift Command's Special Mission program supports worldwide oceanographic programs with ships that perform acoustical, biological, physical and geophysical surveys. These ships gather data that provides much of the military's information on the ocean environment. The collected data helps to improve technology in undersea warfare and enemy ship detection. The oceanographic and hydrographic survey ships' multi-beam, wide-angle precision sonar systems make it possible to continuously chart a broad strip of ocean floor. Survey ships have charted three-fourths of the world's coastlines, making it easier for navigators to find their way along both well-traveled and not-so-familiar shipping routes.

# General Dynamics Electric Boat Awarded \$5.1 Billion for Columbia-Class SSBNs



An artist's rendering of the Columbia class of submarines, currently under construction. *GENERAL DYNAMICS* GROTON, Conn. – General Dynamics Electric Boat announced Dec. 21 the U.S. Navy has awarded a \$5.1-billion modification of the previously awarded Columbia Integrated Product and Process Development Contract for the Columbia class of submarines, the nation's next-generation sea-based strategic deterrent.

Electric Boat is the prime contractor on the Columbia program, which will replace the aging Ohio class ballistic-missile submarines (SSBNs). The District of Columbia (SSBN 826) and Wisconsin (SSBN 827) are presently under construction.

The contract modification has a value of \$5,134,324,189. Work will be performed in Groton, Connecticut; Quonset Point, Rhode Island; and Newport News, Virginia; and is expected to be completed by October 2030. The award funds advance procurement and advance construction of critical components and material to support Build II (the next five ships in the class), efforts to support continuous missile tube production, enhancements to develop the Submarine Industrial Base, and sustained class maintenance and support.

"This award enhances Electric Boat's efforts to maintain the

Columbia-class production and delivery schedule. Advance procurement of long lead time materials and component construction is critical to the program, and the strategic investments in the development and expansion of the Submarine Industrial Base will help stabilize and grow the supply chain, which increases manufacturing capacity, reduces risk and ultimately drives timely delivery of submarines to the Navy," said Kevin Graney, president of General Dynamics Electric Boat.

At 560 feet long with a displacement of nearly 21,000 tons, the submarines of the Columbia class will be the largest ever built by the United States. Ships of the Columbia class will have a fuel core that will power the submarine for its entire service life, eliminating the need for a mid-service refueling. Electric Boat will deliver the lead ship to the Navy in 2027.

# USNS Comfort Completes 12th Iteration of Continuing Promise 2022



A graphic depicting hospital ship USNS Comfort (T-AH 20) and the flags and names of all the countries the ship visited during Continuing Promise 2022. U.S. NAVY / Mass Communication Specialist 2nd Class Ethan J. Soto NORFOLK, Va. — The hospital ship USNS Comfort (T-AH 20) returned to its homeport in Norfolk, Virginia, concluding Continuing Promise, Dec. 21, 2022, said Mass Communication Specialist 3rd Class Deven Fernandez, U.S. Naval Forces Southern Command / U.S. 4th Fleet, in a release.

The Continuing Promise 2022 team worked collectively with participating host and partner nations to enhance regional interoperability and disaster response capabilities, increase security and stability in the region, and foster new and enduring friendships in Caribbean, Central and South American region.

Comfort visited Guatemala, Honduras, Colombia, Dominican Republic and Haiti throughout the mission. The crew aboard Comfort included U.S. military and civilians, more than a dozen non-governmental organizations and military members from Brazil, Canada, Chile, Colombia, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Honduras, Netherlands and United Kingdom.

Continuing Promise 2022 saw more than 13,000 patients, participated in more than 25 subject matter expert exchanges,

conducted five humanitarian assistance and disaster relief workshops, shared in 18 Women, Peace and Security initiative events and partook in 11 community relations engagements.

"I am so delighted to have shared this remarkable experience with the men and women of the Continuing Promise 2022 team," said Capt. Kathryn Elliott, commanding officer of the Medical Treatment Facility aboard the hospital ship USNS Comfort (T-AH 20). "We overcame adversity to provide medical care to the community in these host nations. Along the way we learned so much from our partners. The exchange of information that took place was vital to building upon our long-lasting relationships with the countries of this region. This is Comfort's mission and a true continuing promise."

Over the course of the 2-month mission, there were many accomplishments by the Comfort team. Here are a few of the highlights from Continuing Promise 2022.

#### Puerto Barrios, Guatemala

Oct. 26 - Oct. 31

- 44 surgeries conducted
- 2,957 prescriptions filled
- 7 concerts performed by the U.S. Fleet Forces band
- Pediatric cardiology care provided, which is not available in the area

• Provided life changing surgeries, such as receiving full use of hands

#### Puerto Cortes, Honduras

Nov. 1 - Nov. 7

- 23 surgeries conducted
- 3,350 prescriptions filled
- 7 concerts performed by the U.S. Fleet Forces band
- Held refresher course of BLS for the volunteers at the Red Cross
- Refurbished local school in Puerto Cortes

#### Cartagena, Colombia

Nov. 11 - Nov. 20

- 143 surgeries conducted
- 7,012 prescriptions filled
- 6 concerts performed by the U.S. Fleet Forces band
- Refurbished local school by adding a new coat of paint

• Supported embassy in the handover of materials to local community

Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic

Nov. 27 - Dec. 6

- 87 surgeries conducted
- 7,446 prescriptions filled
- 137 patients received physical therapy treatment
- 209 X-Rays taken
- 78 Ultrasounds performed

### Jeremie, Haiti

Dec. 11 - Dec. 17

- 14,012 prescriptions filled
- 1,035 patients seen
- 55 pallets of medical supplies and other goods donated

Since its inaugural mission in 2007, Continuing Promise missions have treated more than 595,000 patients and conducted over 7,250 surgeries in the region. The successful completion of the mission marks the end of the 12th Continuing Promise.

U.S. Naval Forces Southern Command/U.S. 4th Fleet supports U.S. Southern Command's joint and combined military operations by employing maritime forces in cooperative maritime security operations to maintain access, enhance interoperability and build enduring partnerships in order to enhance regional security and promote peace, stability and prosperity in the Caribbean, Central and South American region.

# USCGC Hamilton Returns Home after Historic Sixth Feet Deployment



The U.S. Coast Guard Cutter Hamilton (WMSL 753) moors to the pier in North Charleston, South Carolina, Dec. 21. U.S. COAST GUARD / Petty Officer 2nd Class Brandon Hillard NORTH CHARLESTON, S.C. – The crew of U.S. Coast Guard Cutter Hamilton (WMSL 753) returned to their homeport Dec. 21 in North Charleston following a 94-day deployment in the U.S. Naval Forces Europe – Africa area of operations, the Coast Guard Atlantic Area said in a release.

Hamilton's crew operated in support of the U.S. Sixth Fleet and was tasked to defend U.S., allied and partner interests. Hamilton began its deployment with a transatlantic voyage to Rota, Spain and met with operational commanders from U.S. Sixth Fleet. After Spain, the cutter transited through the English Channel and Danish Straits, two vitally significant waterways that provide safe passage for 15% of the world's shipping.

Immediately upon entering the Baltic Sea region, Hamilton conducted at-sea exchanges with naval, coast guard and border guard forces of multiple Baltic Sea allies and partners, including Sweden, Finland, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania. Each engagement was oriented to support either traditional Coast Guard missions or in combination with defense readiness exercises used to enhance interoperability between the U.S. and NATO partners.

As the first U.S. military vessel to visit Turku, Finland in over a decade, Hamilton hosted public tours of the cutter and held a reception for U.S. and Finnish government and military leaders. Guests included the U.S. Ambassador to the Republic of Finland, the deputy chief of the Finnish Border Guard, the state secretary of the Ministry of Interior and the mayor of Turku. The visit also served to reinforce the long-standing partnership between the Finnish Border Guard and the U.S. Coast Guard.

Additionally, Hamilton is the first U.S. Coast Guard cutter to visit Riga, Latvia in more than 20 years. The crew met with the U.S. ambassador to Latvia and hosted a reception on board Hamilton for members of Latvia's navy and coast guard to include the Latvian navy's chief of staff and the commander of the Latvian coast guard. Hamilton also served as a backdrop to Latvia's 104th Freedom Day celebration alongside NATO forces.

"It was an honor to grow the relationship between the United States and our Baltic Sea allies and partners during engagements both at sea and in port," said Capt. Matthew Brown, commanding officer of Hamilton. "By working side by side with our current and future NATO allies, we learned just how much we have in common, and we were left with a stronger appreciation for our shared values. I could not be more proud of this crew's hard work and sacrifice while serving as the United States' representatives in the Baltic."

Hamilton's deployment demonstrated the strategic value of conducting meaningful at-sea engagements, subject matter exchanges and port visits with allies and partners in the high northern latitudes and Baltic Sea region. The U.S. maritime services regularly operate with partner nations to cultivate a cohesive force to maintain freedom of the seas, ensure free economic exchange and maintain maritime security.

"The U.S. Coast Guard is a proud and capable partner of the U.S. Joint Forces serving in the Europe and Africa areas of operations," said Vice Adm. Kevin E. Lunday, commander of Coast Guard Atlantic Area. "We will continue to build maritime domain awareness and share best practices with our partner nations' navies and coast guards."

Hamilton is a 418-foot, Legend-class national security cutter with a crew of 160. 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 worldwide deployable asset that supports the Department of Homeland Security, Department of Defense and national objectives to include drug interdiction, migrant interdiction, national defense, search and rescue, fisheries enforcement and national intelligence collection.

# USCGC Vigorous Returns Home after a 48-day Multi-Mission Patrol



U.S. Coast Guard Cutter Vigorous moored at home port in Virginia Beach, Virginia Dec. 21, 2022. Vigorous is a 210foot, Reliance-class medium endurance cutter with a crew of 74. U.S. COAST GUARD / Petty Officer 3rd Class Kate Kilroy VIRGINIA BEACH, Va. – The crew of the U.S. Coast Guard Cutter Vigorous (WMEC 627) returned to their homeport in Virginia Beach Dec. 21, following a 48-day patrol in the Northern Caribbean Sea, the Coast Guard Atlantic Area said in a release.

In support of the Coast Guard's Seventh District, Vigorous' crew conducted maritime safety and security missions as they responded to the historically high migration activity and remained prepared to interdict and disrupt the flow of illegal narcotics in the South Florida Straits and Windward Pass.

During the patrol, Vigorous traveled more than 8,000 miles and

contributed to the safe transfer of more than 500 Cuban nationals. Vigorous worked with numerous Coast Guard assets, U.S. Customs and Border Protection boats and good Samaritan vessels to detect, deter and intercept unsafe and illegal ventures bound for the United States.

"The Vigorous crew's remarkable professionalism, competence and determination were on full display as we met the diverse challenges of operations at sea," said Cmdr. Ryan Waters, commanding officer of Vigorous. "Whether executing days of small boat operations late into the night or rendering assistance to mariners on a disabled vessel, the Vigorous crew exceeded expectations at every turn. After a successful patrol, we look forward to returning home to our family and friends on shore."

Vigorous is a 210-foot, Reliance-class medium-endurance with a crew of 74. The cutter's primary missions are counter-drug operations, migrant interdiction, enforcing federal fishery laws and search and rescue in support of U.S. Coast Guard operations throughout the Western Hemisphere.