Coast Guard Commissions USCGC John Witherspoon in Kodiak, Alaska



The Coast Guard Cutter John Witherspoon (WPC 1158) crew displays signal flags during the cutter's commissioning ceremony at Coast Guard Base Kodiak, Alaska, April 3, 2025. The commissioning marked the first of three fast response cutters scheduled to homeport in Alaska and was presided over by Rear Adm. Megan Dean, commander of the Seventeenth Coast Guard District. (U.S. Coast Guard photo by Petty Officer 1st Class Shannon Kearney)

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KODIAK, Alaska – The Coast Guard commissioned its newest cutter, Coast Guard Cutter John Witherspoon (WPC 1158) for

official entry into its service fleet during a ceremony held in Kodiak, Thursday.

The ceremony was presided over by Rear Adm. Megan Dean, commander of the Seventeenth Coast Guard District. Members of the Witherspoon family were also in attendance, including the cutter's sponsor, Regina Nash, the daughter of John Witherspoon.

The Witherspoon is the 58th Fast Response Cutter (FRC) in the service and the first of three FRCs scheduled to be homeported at Coast Guard Base Kodiak. The crew of the Witherspoon will primarily serve in and around the Aleutian Islands, Bering Sea, Gulf of Alaska, and North Pacific Ocean. The cutter is designed for missions such as search and rescue; fishery patrols; drug and migrant interdiction; national defense; and ports, waterways, and coastal security.

The namesake for the cutter, Capt. John G. Witherspoon, enlisted in the Coast Guard in 1963 and commissioned as an ensign in 1971. During his career, Witherspoon rose to the rank of captain and served as the commanding officer on Coast Guard Cutters Mallow (WLB 396), Valiant (WMEC 621), and Dependable (WMEC 626).

During his tenure, Witherspoon became the first African American to command a medium endurance cutter and the first African American officer to command both afloat and ashore units. He earned both the Coast Guard Meritorious Service Medal and two Coast Guard Commendation Medals during his career.

In honor of his dedication to mentorship amongst Coast Guard personnel, the Coast Guard established the Captain John G. Witherspoon Inspirational Leadership Award, which is given to one active duty officer and one reserve officer each year who demonstrate Witherspoon's qualities of honor, respect, and devotion to duty.

The Coast Guard has ordered a total of 65 FRCs to replace the 1980s-era Island-class 110-foot patrol boats. The FRCs feature advanced command, control, communications, computers, intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance equipment; over-the-horizon cutter boat deployment to reach vessels of interest; and improved habitability and seakeeping.

The commissioning ceremony is a traditional milestone in the life of a cutter that marks its entry into active service and represents the cutter’s readiness to conduct Coast Guard operations.