

Coast Guard Cutter Forward Returns Home After Seizing More Than \$23M in Cocaine



From U.S. Coast guard Atlantic Area, May 19, 2025

PORTSMOUTH, VA – The crew of Coast Guard Cutter Forward (WMEC 911) returned to their home port in Portsmouth, Monday, following a 79-day patrol in the Eastern Pacific Ocean.

Forward's crew deployed in support of Joint Interagency Task Force – South (JIATF-S) to conduct counter-drug operations while underway in the Eleventh Coast Guard District's area of responsibility. Through detection, monitoring and interdiction efforts, crew members directly reduced the flow of illicit narcotics into the United States. Forward's crew worked alongside additional units to include Coast Guard Cutters Kimball (WMSL 756), Thetis (WMEC 910), and the Coast Guard

Tactical Law Enforcement Team – South (TACLET-S) to stop suspected drug smuggling while patrolling off the Pacific coast of Central and South America.

While at sea, the cutter interdicted a vessel engaged in drug-trafficking. After it was detected by a maritime patrol aircraft, a Coast Guard boarding team that included members from TACLET-S launched to pursue the vessel, which led to the apprehension of four suspected drug traffickers. A second small boat crew was launched to locate and recover 37 bales of cocaine that were jettisoned by the suspected traffickers, resulting in the seizure of 2,039 pounds of cocaine worth more than \$23 million.

“Transnational criminal organizations are smart and sophisticated, and our crews meet that challenge head-on,” said Cmdr. Andrew Grantham, commanding officer of Forward. “Throughout this demanding patrol, our team performed with professionalism and determination. However, as a 35-year-old cutter, Forward faces increasing limitations that can impact mission effectiveness – including lost opportunities to interdict known threats. As the Commandant has stated, we continue to feel the strain of sustaining aging assets. Continued investment in new capabilities will ensure we remain ready to counter evolving threats in the maritime domain.”

On May 17, the crew of Forward rescued two people and their disabled 60-foot sailboat nearly 90 miles offshore of Charleston, South Carolina. Forward’s crew towed the sailboat to coastal waters, where a Station Charleston boat crew and a commercial salvage vessel took over and safely transported the two sailors and their boat to shore. No injuries were reported.

During the deployment, Forward’s crew engaged with Ecuadorian navy officials and valued partners in the Galápagos Islands during a port of call on San Cristóbal Island, Ecuador. Forward hosted the delegation aboard the cutter, providing a

tour to highlight Coast Guard capabilities in support of U.S., Ecuadorian, and international joint objectives.

Support from TACLET-S, which is based in Miami, improves mission capability. As part of the Coast Guard's deployable specialized forces, LEDETs deliver boarding officer teams for high-risk maritime interdiction operations. These units are highly skilled and experienced in counter-drug missions and enforcing U.S. law at sea.

JIATF-S, in conjunction with partner nations, works to target, detect and monitor illicit drug trafficking within the joint operating area. The organization facilitates the interdiction and apprehension of illicit traffickers to dismantle transnational criminal organizations while reducing the flow of drugs to the public. 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 Eastern Pacific Ocean are performed by members of the U.S. Coast Guard under the authority and control of the Coast Guard's Eleventh District, headquartered in Alameda, California.

Forward is a 270-foot, Famous-class medium endurance cutter. The cutter's primary missions are counter-drug and migrant interdiction operations, as well as search and rescue in support of U.S. Coast Guard operations throughout the Western Hemisphere. The cutter falls under the command of U.S. Coast Guard Atlantic Area, which is based in Portsmouth, Virginia.

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