USCGC Reliance Returns to Florida After 60-day Operation Vigilant Sentry Patrol



Coast Guard Cutter Reliance (WMEC 615) deck crew members handle line during towing operations with the cutter's small boat, Oct. 11, 2024, while at sea in the Windward Passage. Reliance's crew completed a 60-day patrol in the Seventh Coast Guard District area of responsibility to conduct maritime safety and security missions. (U.S. Coast Guard photo by Ensign Sarah Kaleta)

From U.S. Coast Guard Atlantic Area, Nov. 7, 2024

PENSACOLA, Fla. – The crew of Coast Guard Cutter Reliance (WMEC 615) returned to their home port in Pensacola, Oct. 28, following a 60-day patrol in the Windward Passage.

Throughout their deployment in the Seventh Coast Guard District's area of responsibility, the crew's primary missions were to protect the safety of life at sea and deter dangerous and unlawful migrant ventures bound for the United States. Deployed in support of the Homeland Security Task Force – Southeast (HSTF-SE) initiative Operation Vigilant Sentry (OVS), Reliance's crew worked alongside additional Coast Guard and partner assets to dissuade maritime migration and enforce immigration laws on the high seas.

While on patrol, Reliance's crew interdicted four overloaded and unsafe vessels, ultimately saving the lives of 441 Haitian and Dominican migrants, including many infants and children.

During two hazardous and similar cases, Reliance's crew located the unseaworthy migrant voyages in the dark of night and evacuated nearly 200 migrants from each vessel. Crew members moved the migrants to safety while preventing their grossly overloaded vessels from capsizing. After transferring the migrants from their unsafe vessels aboard the cutter, the crew provided humanitarian aid and care until the migrants could be safely repatriated to their countries of origin.

Of note, this was an historic patrol for the Coast Guard's oldest medium endurance cutter; after 60 years in service, this was Reliance's first patrol with a fully mixed-gender crew. Reliance recently completed a project to provide onboard accommodations for female enlisted crew members, increasing opportunities for female Coast Guard members to serve afloat.

"I am extremely proud of and have been continually impressed by our crew during my first deployment onboard Reliance," said Cmdr. Aaron Kowalczk, commanding officer of Reliance. "Their tireless effort and relentless compassion for the Coast Guard's humanitarian mission was inspiring and ultimately resulted in saving hundreds of lives while deterring illicit

maritime migration. As Reliance enters her seventh decade of service, the ship and especially this crew remain ‘Semper Paratus – Always Ready’ for the next mission.”

Established in 2003, HSTF-SE is the Department of Homeland Security (DHS)-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.

Reliance is a 210-foot, Reliance-class medium endurance cutter with a crew of 77. The cutter’s primary missions are counter-narcotics and migrant interdiction operations, living marine resources protection, and search and rescue in support of U.S. Coast Guard operations throughout the Western Hemisphere.

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