

Coast Guard Cutter Valiant Exits Active Duty After 57 Years of Service



Coast Guard Cutter Valiant (WMEC 621) is moored to the pier at Naval Station Mayport in Jacksonville, Florida, June 17, 2024. The cutter was honored after more than 57 years of service during a heritage recognition ceremony held in front of Coast Guard and cutter leadership, the assembled crew and former crew members, family and friends. (U.S. Coast Guard photo by Petty Officer 2nd Class Brandon Hillard)

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NAVAL STATION MAYPORT, Fla. – The Coast Guard held a heritage recognition ceremony, Tuesday, in Jacksonville to honor the U.S. Coast Guard Cutter Valiant (WMEC 621) and recognize its more than 57 years of exemplary service.

The ceremony was presided over by Rear Adm. Adam Chamie,

assistant commandant for operations integration and response policy, Coast Guard Headquarters in Washington, D.C., and served to celebrate Valiant's contributions to the Coast Guard and nation in the presence of cutter leadership, current and former crew members, families and friends.

In addition to Chamie, a former commanding officer of Valiant, 2014-2016, the official party included: Cmdr. Matthew Press, commanding officer of Valiant, retired Capt. Timothy Cronin, former commanding officer of Valiant, 2016-2018, Senior Chief Petty Officer Clark Lauer, command senior enlisted leader of Valiant, Lt. Cmdr. Merrill Gutowski, executive officer of Valiant and master of ceremonies, and Chaplain Duke Leon Ann'El, Fraternal Order of Police, former Valiant crew member, 2006-2007.

The event also marked the ship's exit from active-duty service for an indeterminate time, placing it in commission, special status. The 210-foot Valiant operated as a Coast Guard Atlantic Area Command asset, based in Portsmouth, Virginia, and was most recently homeported in Mayport.

Valiant, a multi-mission cutter, was built in Lorain, Ohio by the American Shipbuilding Company and was commissioned, Nov. 3, 1967. The cutter is the 7th of 16 vessels built in the Reliance-class of medium endurance cutters that have operated in the Coast Guard's fleet. These cutters were designed for search and rescue, law enforcement missions such as counter-drug and alien interdiction, as well as national defense and international engagement.

Valiant was named after the inspirational trait, which means to act with courage and determination. It is the first Coast Guard cutter to bear its name.

The cutter has been helmed by several notable commanding officers to include, Adm. James Loy, former commandant of the Coast Guard, 1998-2002, and Capt. John G. Witherspoon, the

first African American officer to command a medium endurance cutter and for whom the annual John G. Witherspoon Inspirational Leadership Award, which recognizes the Coast Guard officer, active duty and reserve, who best exemplifies the Coast Guard's Core Values of Honor, Respect and Devotion to Duty, is named.

Valiant spent its first 24 years in the Coast Guard Eighth District area of responsibility while being homeported in Galveston, Texas. While there, it earned its nickname, "Guardian of the Gulf," after crews assisted in several high-profile search and rescue cases.

In 1971, Valiant provided assistance after two Venezuelan freighters collided.

In 1972, the crew of Valiant supported the International Ice Patrol and identified icebergs off the coast of Newfoundland, Canada, locating hazards to navigation in the North Atlantic Ocean.

Later in the decade, the cutter responded to a collision between a tanker and a freighter in 1979.

Valiant played a crucial role in the mass Cuban exodus of 1980 known as the Mariel Boatlift, while working alongside numerous Coast Guard cutters, small boats, aircraft, and U.S. Navy vessels.

In June of 1990, Valiant and other Coast Guard cutters responded to the 853-foot Norwegian tanker Mega Borg after a deadly explosion in the engine room led to the release of oil approximately 60 miles off the coast of Texas. Valiant's crew persevered through complex logistical problems, mounting an effective firefighting, salvage and pollution cleanup campaign.

Between 1991 and 1994, the cutter was decommissioned for the purpose of undergoing a major maintenance availability at the Coast Guard Yard in Baltimore, Maryland, extending its service operational life through modifications and modernizations.

After Valiant was recommissioned in January of 1994, it was transferred to the Seventh Coast Guard District area of responsibility and relocated to its second home port of Miami Beach for the next 18 years.

During Operations Able Manner and Able Vigil in 1994, the crew of Valiant interdicted over 500 Haitian and Cuban migrants. And the cutter repatriated over 1,900 Haitian migrants from Guantánamo Bay, Cuba to Port-au-Prince, Haiti over the course of 11 passages during this time.

Valiant served as patrol commander during the 1996 Summer Olympics sailing events in Savannah, Georgia, where the cutter directed over 29 Coast Guard assets to help ensure security for 800 athletes representing 98 different countries.

In 1997, the cutter's crew helped train over 500 Caribbean Coast Guard members during Operation Tradewinds. Valiant taught personnel from 12 countries in fields such as damage control, engineering and seamanship fundamentals.

In January 1999, a Valiant and Coast Guard law enforcement detachment (LEDET) 406 boarding team interdicted over 10,000 pounds of cocaine from the merchant ship Cannes.

On Nov. 7, 1999, the crew of Valiant discovered a person in the water and another on the sinking hull of a partially submerged vessel. The two were enroute to Antigua and spent over 30 hours before they were rescued.

A few days later, Valiant's crew rendezvoused with the HMS Northumberland and an embarked U.S. Coast Guard LEDET aboard

the British naval vessel to intercept over 2.5 tons of cocaine aboard the the motor vessel Adriatik. After three days of lifting 110-pound bags of sugar, the crew of Valiant uncovered the illicit narcotics.

Later in the same month, Valiant served as on-scene commander while attempting to locate two missing sailing vessels near Saba Island, Netherlands Antilles in the wake of Hurricane Lenny. Their efforts located several capsized vessels adrift in the region, but unfortunately only one survivor was found.

In 2003, the first official Department of Homeland Security secretary's speech was given by Secretary Thomas Ridge aboard Valiant at the Port of Miami.

In 2004, Valiant conducted alien migration interdiction operations during the Haiti rebellion, repatriating 531 Haitians intercepted on boats as they fled growing violence and turmoil fueled by rebel forces.

While deployed in 2006 to the Caribbean Basin and Florida Straits, Valiant's crew interdicted 270 aliens attempting to enter the U.S. illegally and assisted the government of the Bahamas, seizing a Dominic Republic-flagged vessel illegally fishing in Bahamian territorial seas. The 65 crew members aboard the fishing vessel Barlovento were later transferred to Bahamain officials. During the same patrol, the crew made a port of call in Miami to host a presidential visit by President George W. Bush.

The cutter interdicted nearly five tons of cocaine from four separate smuggling vessels during a 2009 patrol. The narcotics, worth over \$125 million, were seized as a result of coordinated efforts between Valiant's crew, other Coast Guard assets and U.S. Customs and Border Patrol aircraft.

The crew of Valiant responded to the Haiti Earthquake of 2010, both supporting relief efforts while countering mass migration

at sea. Valiant crew members assisted the Haitian Coast Guard to repair their damaged assets and coordinated with the Haitian government and the United Nations to open Cap-Haitien as a resupply and repatriation port during the earthquake's aftermath.

On Aug. 8, 2012, Valiant transferred to its current home port of Mayport.

In 2017, Valiant conducted a counter-drug patrol in support of Joint Interagency Task Force – South. While deployed to the coast of Central and South America, the crew seized \$47 million worth of cocaine and rescued several seas turtles entangled in garbage.

In October 2019, during an Eastern Pacific patrol, the cutter interdicted a self-propelled semi-submersible, a fishing vessel and a go-fast vessel. These actions resulted in Valiant seizing 16,000 pounds of cocaine worth over \$218 million.

In September 2023, Valiant's crew encountered a man in a giant hamster wheel, known as a hydro-pod, well off the Georgia coast. The man was warned about the approaching hurricanes and urged to abandon his unsafe vessel. Despite threats of self-harm and violence, the case was eventually handed over to another Coast Guard vessel, and after three days, he was arrested.

Most recently, Valiant completed a 33-day patrol in the Caribbean Sea earlier this year where the crew conducted counter-drug operations and seized 10,000 pounds of cocaine. The crew was transferred additional contraband from interdictions made by foreign naval partners with embarked Coast Guard law enforcement detachments on board. On June 6, the crew offloaded a combined total of 17,450 pounds of cocaine and 2,585 pounds of marijuana worth \$132 million at Port Everglades.

The Valiant now transitions into an inactive shipyard status as part of the Coast Guard's efforts to modernize its cutter fleet to combat the evolving security threats in the maritime domain. Force Design 2028 is an accelerated effort to transform the Coast Guard into a more agile, capable, and responsive fighting force. By optimizing resources, enhancing workforce readiness and integrating advanced technology to ensure mission readiness, Force Design 2028 provides a bold blueprint to renew the service to be better prepared to meet the mission readiness demanded by the American public.

Once back at the Coast Guard Yard, Valiant's current crew will transition to different units both ashore and afloat, a step taken to help ensure the Coast Guard's ability to prioritize lifesaving missions, national security, and protection of the Maritime Transportation System with no degradation to these critical services.

"I am grateful and thankful for our team. The crew makes the cutter, and I am honored to be part of this extraordinary team," said Cmdr. Matthew Press, commanding officer of Valiant. "I am honored to be part of Valiant's prestigious legacy."

Valiant is a 210-foot, Reliance-class medium endurance cutter with a crew of 64 and 12 officers. Since commissioning in 1967, Valiant has conducted search and rescue missions, counter-drug and alien interdiction operations, supported national defense, marine environmental protection and homeland security missions and participated in the International Ice Patrol.

To view b-roll of the ceremony, click [here](#).

For information on how to join the U.S. Coast Guard, visit [GoCoastGuard.com](https://www.go CoastGuard.com) to learn about active duty, reserve, officer and enlisted opportunities.

Information on how to apply to the U.S. Coast Guard Academy can be found [here](#).