

Coast Guard Reports Busy December with IUU Missions, Rescues, Repatriations



USCGC Stone (WMSL 758) crew members learn how to use immersion suits during an abandon ship drill on the Stone in the waters south of Pensacola, Florida, on Dec. 23, 2020. U.S. Coast Guard / Petty Officer 3rd Class John Hightower

The U.S. Coast Guard announced a spate of activities around the holidays, most recently that the brand-new Coast Guard Cutter Stone (WMSL 758), having just been delivered from builder Huntington Ingalls Industries' Ingalls Shipbuilding, has embarked on a multi-month deployment to the South Atlantic.

There, Stone will counter illegal, unregulated, and unreported (IUU) fishing while strengthening relationships for maritime sovereignty and security throughout the region.

The brand new Legend-class national security cutter, one of the U.S. Coast Guard's flagships, will provide a presence and support national security objectives throughout the Atlantic. This patrol is the cutter's initial shakedown cruise following its delivery in November.

This the service's first patrol to South America in recent memory, engaging partners including Guyana, Brazil, Uruguay, Argentina, and Portugal. The cutter also embarked an observer from the Portuguese navy for the operation's duration.

Operation Southern Cross is conducted in conjunction with U.S. Southern Command, charged with managing operations in Central and South America by working collaboratively to ensure the Western Hemisphere is secure, free, and prosperous.

Christmas Rescue

On Christmas Day, the Coast Guard rescued four boaters Friday from Yamani Islets, 27 miles south of Sitka, Alaska.

A Coast Guard Air Station Sitka MH-60 Jayhawk helicopter crew hoisted the four boaters, a 50-year-old female, and her three children, ages 21, 17, and 13, from shore after their 15-foot vessel capsized. The helicopter crew transported them to Coast Guard Air Station Sitka where they were reported to be in stable condition.

Watchstanders in the Sector Juneau command center received initial notification from a friend at approximately 11 p.m. of an overdue vessel. Sector watchstanders directed the launch of an aircrew from Air Station Sitka and the crew of Coast Guard Cutter Bailey Barco.

During their search, the aircrew received a distress call over VHF radio channel 16 at the entrance of Necker Bay and was able to make contact with the boaters confirming they were all ashore after their vessel capsized.

Counter-Drug Deployment

The week before, Coast Guard Cutter Active returned to its homeport of Port Angeles following a 46-day deployment to the Eastern Pacific Ocean.

Nicknamed "Lil Tough Guy," the Active's crew patrolled 10,056 total nautical miles off the coast of Central America, deployed with an armed Coast Guard MH-65 Dolphin helicopter crew from the Helicopter Interdiction Tactical Squadron (HITRON) in Jacksonville, Florida.

HITRON helped Active search for, detect and stop, drug smuggling vessels.

Pacific Area Tactical Law Enforcement Team (TACLET) personnel sailed with the Active and augmented the unit's law

enforcement capabilities, proving critical during interdictions. TACLET are Coast Guard members that specialize in counter-narcotics tactics and procedures and deploy aboard U.S. and allied navy ships that transit drug trafficking areas.

In just 72 hours, the Active crew interdicted two vessels suspected of drug smuggling and seized approximately 4,200 kilograms of cocaine worth \$159 million. These efforts resulted in the detainment of 13 suspected narcotics traffickers.

The Active is a 210-foot medium endurance cutter homeported in Port Angeles and routinely deploys in support of counter-drug, migrant interdiction, fisheries, and search and rescue and homeland security missions.

Repatriation

On Dec. 18, the crew of Coast Guard Cutter Resolute repatriated 110 Haitian migrants after stopping a voyage approximately 50 miles north of Cap-Haitien, Haiti.

A forward-deployed Coast Guard Air Station Clearwater MH-60 Jayhawk helicopter crew spotted a 40-foot vessel overloaded with people. Resolute's crew diverted and brought the people aboard out of abundance of caution for safety of life at sea.

"I could not be prouder of the crew for safely interdicting and deterring migrant ventures through coordinated efforts to enforce U.S and partner nation treaties and laws," Cmdr. Justin Vanden Heuvel, commander, Coast Guard Cutter Resolute. "Resolute's crew was exceptional in ensuring safety of life at sea, as well as providing around-the-clock care for 110 guests and creating an atmosphere of compassion and dignity prior to repatriation."

IUU Fishing

Earlier in the month, the crew of the Palau Division of Marine Law Enforcement patrol boat PSS President HI Remeliik II coordinated with the U.S. Coast Guard to apprehend a suspected illegal fishing vessel off Helen Reef.

The U.S. Coast Guard dispatched resources that included an Air Station Barbers Point HC-130 Hercules search plane and the Coast Guard Cutter Myrtle Hazard, from Sector Guam, to support the government of Palau to protect their sovereignty and natural resources. The law enforcement action by the crew of the Remeliik II represents the continued cooperation between the Republic of Palau, United States, Australia, Japan, and other partners to halt IUU fishing in the Pacific.

“Our bilateral agreements with Palau and other island nations are proving highly impactful,” said Cmdr. Jason Brand, the Coast Guard Fourteenth District Chief of Enforcement. “IUU fishing has replaced piracy as the leading global maritime security threat. If IUU fishing continues unchecked, we can expect a deterioration of fragile coastal States, collapse of critical fish stock populations and increased tension among foreign-fishing nations, threatening geopolitical stability around the world.”

On Dec. 9, Palau Rangers near Helen Reef reported witnessing an 80-foot vessel illegally fishing nearby. In coordination with the U.S. Coast Guard and the U.S. Global Defense Reform Program contractor assigned to Palau’s Maritime Law Center, the crew of the Remeliik II was dispatched from Koror to apprehend the vessel.