

Coast Guard's Helicopter Interdiction Tactical Squadron Completes 1,000th Interdiction



Coast Guard crews from the Coast Guard Helicopter Interdiction Tactical Squadron, Coast Guard Tactical Law Enforcement Team – South, Coast Guard Cutter Midgett (WMSL 757) helicopter tie-down members and unmanned aerial vehicle personnel pose for a group photo aboard Midgett from behind three bullet-damaged outboard engine cowlings while underway in the Eastern Pacific Ocean, Aug. 28, 2025. On Aug. 25, HITRON used airborne use of force to stop the non-compliant vessel, marking the unit's 1,000th drug interdiction since the unit's inception in 1999, which resulted in Midgett crew members seizing approximately 3,606 pounds of suspected cocaine worth an estimated \$46 million and apprehending six suspected narco-traffickers. (U.S. Coast Guard photo)

From U.S. Coast Guard Headquarters, Sept. 10, 2025

JACKSONVILLE, Fla. – The U.S. Coast Guard's Helicopter Interdiction Tactical Squadron (HITRON) achieved a significant milestone in its counter-drug mission, completing its 1,000th interdiction of suspected narco-trafficking vessels Aug. 25.

Since October 1, 2024, HITRON has interdicted \$3.3 billion in illicit narcotics destined for the United States via maritime routes, a three-fold increase over its historic annual average of \$1 billion.

"HITRON embodies the Coast Guard's spirit of innovation and adaptability," said Vice Adm. Nathan Moore, commander, U.S. Coast Guard Atlantic Area. "From its humble beginnings as a prototype program, it has evolved into a vital force in our counter-narcotics efforts. This milestone is a powerful reminder of the strategic value of this specialized unit in addressing the evolving complex maritime security challenges."

On Aug. 25, a HITRON aviation detachment deployed aboard Coast Guard Cutter Midgett (WMSL 757) observed a suspected narco-trafficking vessel approximately 372 nautical miles southwest of Acapulco, Mexico in the early evening. The helicopter directed the vessel to heave to over the radio and with warning shots. When the vessel failed to comply, the crew used precision rifle fire from the helicopter to disable the vessel's engine, in accordance with airborne use of force policy. A Coast Guard law enforcement boarding team from Midgett seized more than 3,600 pounds of suspected cocaine that was found aboard and jettisoned in the waters around the vessel, estimated to have a street value of \$49 million.

HITRON is based in Jacksonville, Florida and a component of [U.S. Coast Guard Atlantic Area Command](#). It was founded in 1999 as a classified prototype program to test the ability of

Coast Guard aircraft to employ precision fire to disable narcotics smuggling vessels. With impressive early results, this team grew from the initial ten personnel to its current size of over 200 Active Duty, Reservists, and civilian members, including an exchange pilot from the United Kingdom's Royal Navy. Since its founding, HITRON has interdicted \$33.2 billion in illicit drugs during operations in the Eastern Pacific Ocean and Caribbean Sea, and over the past 26 years has averaged one interdiction every nine days.

Through Operation Pacific Viper, the Coast Guard is accelerating counter-drug operations in the Eastern Pacific Ocean, where significant transport of illicit narcotics continues from South America. In coordination with international and interagency partners, the Coast Guard is surging additional assets—cutters, aircraft and tactical teams—to interdict, seize and disrupt transshipments of cocaine and other bulk illicit drugs. These operations continue the Coast Guard's efforts to protect the Homeland, project maritime law enforcement presence and disrupt transnational criminal organizations and cartels seeking to produce and traffic illicit drugs into the United States.

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