

Cutter Sequoia Returns from Deployment to Republic of Palau



Crew members from the Coast Guard Cutter Sequoia (WLB 215) visit Sonsorol, Palau, to deliver food, fuel, and medicine from the Palau Ministry of Health, Oct. 22, 2020. U.S. Coast Guard

SANTA RITA, Guam – The U.S. Coast Guard Cutter Sequoia (WLB 215) returned Nov. 1 from a deployment that furthered maritime safety and security improvements with the Republic of Palau in late September and October, the Coast Guard 14th District said in a Nov. 2 release.

The mission was an ongoing effort between the U.S. Coast Guard, U.S. Embassy Koror, U.S. Department of the Interior, and Palau to improve the aids to navigation infrastructure and further Palau's maritime transportation system.

"Palau and the Coast Guard have a long, sustained partnership and the Sequoia's deployment furthered this relationship," said Capt. Christopher Chase, commander, U.S. Coast Guard Sector Guam. "Through teamwork between ourselves and Palau we overcame COVID-19 limitations allowing Palau to become the first country to welcome U.S. military deployments to conduct critical aids to navigation, maritime law enforcement, and humanitarian assistance missions."

During the 21-day patrol, the crew of the Sequoia established or serviced 12 aids to navigation in Palau while also working closely with the Palau Ministry of Justice's Department of Maritime Law Enforcement during the Pacific Islands Forum Fisheries Operation Kurukuru to protect Palau's National Marine Sanctuary and exclusive economic zone (EEZ) from

illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing (IUU).

Aids to navigation perform a vital function by providing navigational markers facilitating safe movement of private, commercial, and government vessels through Palau's waters while contributing to the overall safety of the global marine transportation system.

Prior to the mission, the crew of the Sequoia, U.S. Coast Guard and U.S. Army dive teams undertook extensive COVID-19 precautions including testing and quarantine to ensure the safety of both the crews and the people of Palau.

An important goal of both the United States and Palau is the protection of the Pacific Ocean's fish stocks. IUU fishing poses a serious threat to the Pacific's fish population and throughout the patrol the Sequoia's crew worked closely with the Palau Ministry of Justice's Department of Maritime Law Enforcement to protect the country's EEZ including jointly participating in the Pacific Islands Forum Fisheries Operation Kurukuru.

Operation Kurukuru is a coordinated maritime surveillance operation between partners in the region. The operation's success depends on the ability of partners like Palau and the United States to work together.

Throughout the cutter's time in Palau the crew of the Sequoia partnered with Palau's Maritime Law Enforcement officers to monitor fishing vessels within Palau's EEZ. This collaboration enhanced Palau's maritime domain awareness and vessel monitoring to help protect the county's fisheries from IUU.

The cutter's crew completed five vessel sightings throughout the operation, relaying the information back to Palau's Maritime Law Enforcement officers for future fisheries patrols.

The Sequoia also engaged in a humanitarian mission to the island of Sonsorol during the patrol, delivering supplies including food, fuel, and medicine from the Palau Ministry of Health to the island.

Accompanying the Sequoia to Sonsorol was the Sonsorol State Gov. Nicholas Aquino, Delegate Yutaka Gibbons, Jr., U.S. Ambassador John Hennessey-Niland, Lt. Cmdr. Clint Moore of the Royal Australian Navy, and Lt. Cmdr. Tommy Tomika of the Japan Coast Guard.

The visit to Sonsorol served dual purposes. While the crew delivered the supplies, the dignitaries surveyed the island for possible future civil and defense building projects.

“This patrol has showcased the flexibility and multi-mission nature of Sequoia,” said Lt. Cmdr. Ryan Adams, the commanding officer of the Sequoia. “We completed aids to navigation maintenance in the waters of Guam, Rota, and Saipan and patrolled the high seas west of the Mariana Islands to detect and deter IUU fishing. We also worked closely with our partners in Palau on missions to establish aids to navigation with the support of Coast Guard and Army divers and enhance Palau’s maritime domain awareness capabilities. I am proud of the skill, resilience, and determination demonstrated by the crew of Sequoia throughout this patrol.”