

Cutter Tampa Returns Home after Interdicting More than \$94M of Illicit Drugs



Two Coast Guard Cutter Tampa crewmembers pass a bale of cocaine during a drug offload at Base Miami Beach, Miami, Florida, April 20, 2021. The Tampa crew interdicted a low profile vessel off the coast of Punta Gallinas, Colombia, which resulted in 87 bales of cocaine, weighing approximately 5,500 pounds, and worth an estimated \$94.6 million. *U.S. COAST GUARD / Chief Petty Officer Charly Tautfest*

PORTSMOUTH, Va. – The Coast Guard Cutter Tampa returned to its homeport in Portsmouth after completing a 56-day counter narcotics patrol in the Central Caribbean, April 25, the Coast Guard 5th District said in an April 29 release.

The crew of the Tampa began their patrol by embarking an armed helicopter aircrew from the Coast Guard's Helicopter Interdiction Tactical Squadron in Mayport, Florida, which the

crew used in conjunction with their over-the-horizon-capable pursuit boat to stop suspected drug smuggling vessels.

During their patrol, a maritime patrol flight spotted a vessel on April 9, and a law enforcement team from the Tampa detained three suspects and discovered 87 bales of cocaine, totaling approximately 5,500 pounds of cocaine, worth an estimated \$94.6 million.

The crew of the Tampa's efforts to combat drug smuggling in the Caribbean are part of Operation Martillo, a larger effort to increase regional stability and undermine the influence of Transnational Criminal Organizations, who routinely attempt to smuggle drugs throughout the region.

The Tampa crew prioritized readiness during the COVID-19 pandemic and incorporated a series of precautionary measures to include personal protective equipment, as well as the incorporation of vaccinations for members to ensure its crew, family members and community continue to remain safe while achieving mission excellence.

"This was our third patrol we have conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic, and the crew of the Tampa never ceases to impress me with their incredible perseverance, devotion, and adaptability that they use to tackle each patrol and achieve mission success," said Capt. Michael Cilenti, Tampa's commanding officer. "Of course, I would be remiss in not mentioning the true heroes of this patrol, and every patrol: our family and friends back at home, who constantly support us and give us the inspiration to work that much harder. Our success in interdicting the first Caribbean low profile vessel is a testament to that teamwork and focus on mission excellence that makes Tampa so special."