National Security Cutter Bertholf Departs for Western Pacific Patrol

ALAMEDA, Calif. – On a gray and foggy morning, tears intermingled with rain as family members braved the elements to say goodbye to the 170 crewmembers of Coast Guard Cutter Bertholf, a 418-foot national security cutter, which departed Alameda, California, Jan. 20 for a patrol in the Western Pacific Ocean, the Coast Guard Pacific Area said in a release of the same date.

The U.S. Coast Guard has an enduring role in the Indo-Pacific going back over 150 years. The service's ongoing deployment of resources to the region directly supports U.S. foreign policy and national security objectives in the Indo-Pacific Strategy and the National Security Strategy.

"The United States is a Pacific nation," said Vice Adm. Linda Fagan, commander, Coast Guard Pacific Area, who was present to see the cutter depart. "We have deep and long-standing ties with our partners in the region, and more importantly, we share a strong commitment to a free and open Indo-Pacific, governed by a rules-based international system that promotes peace, security, prosperity and sovereignty of all nations."

Bertholf will be operating in support of U.S. Indo-Pacific Command, which oversees military operations in the region. As part of its planned operations, the cutter will engage in professional exchanges and capacity building with partner nations.

"Security abroad equals security at home," said Fagan. "Enhancing our partners' capabilities is a force multiplier in combating transnational criminal and terrorist organizations and deterring our adversaries."

As both a federal law enforcement agency and an armed force, the Coast Guard is uniquely positioned to conduct defense operations in support of Combatant Commanders on all seven continents. The service routinely provides forces in joint military operations worldwide, including the deployment of cutters, boats, aircraft and deployable specialized forces.

“I’m excited to see Bertholf sail today to the Indo-Pacific region of operations,” said Fagan, who described the cutter as one of the most capable in the Coast Guard fleet.

“They will be serving alongside other DoD military forces, particularly the U.S. Navy, and I know they will contribute key capabilities to that mission set. This crew has worked incredibly hard to get ready for today’s sailing, and I can’t think of a better ship and crew to be sending to the Indo-Pacific.”

Commissioned in 2008, Bertholf is the first of the Coast Guard’s Legend-class national security cutters. These advanced ships are 418-feet long, 54-feet wide, and have a 4,600 long-ton displacement. They have a top speed in excess of 28 knots, a range of 12,000 nautical miles, endurance of up to 90 days and can hold a crew of up to 170.

The Coast Guard is scheduled to commission its seventh national security cutter, Kimball, in 2019. Kimball, along with the Midgett, which is currently under construction, will be homeported in Honolulu and will enhance the Coast Guard’s presence throughout the Indo-Pacific.

“The U.S. Coast Guard’s unique authorities, capabilities, and missions make us the maritime safety and security partner of choice for sea-going countries around the world,” said Capt. John Driscoll, Bertholf’s commanding officer. “Our increased presence throughout the Indo-Pacific will enhance regional stability and improve maritime governance and security.”

In an address to the families and crew before the cutter set

sail, Driscoll emphasized how critical family support is to crew wellbeing and readiness.

“Support from our families, wherever they live, is vital to ensuring we are ready to sail and answer the demands of our nation,” Driscoll said. “We must ensure our families are ready to weather the storm at home. We operate in a dangerous and high-consequence environment, and your ability to focus on mission can become easily compromised if you are worried about family.”

Fagan acknowledged the current lapse in appropriations and government shutdown has added stress and feelings of uncertainty to the typical emotions that surround a cutter departure.

“I know it is hard for these crews to be leaving behind their dependents and spouses – it’s a thousand times more so when everyone is wondering when our next paycheck will be, and how they can support the family they are leaving behind,” Fagan said.

“There has been an incredible outpouring of support for the families here in the Alameda area, but the tension and the anxiety for the crew is real,” said Fagan. “We are standing by to help support those families who are left behind the same way that we are going to support the crew as they sail for the Western Pacific.”