U.S. Coast Guard strengthens historic relationship with Philippines during landmark visit to Tacloban

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TACLOBAN, Philippines – In a historic first, the USCGC Frederick Hatch (WPC 1143) visited partners in Tacloban, Philippines, from Oct. 19 to 23, 2023, and the crew conducted engagements marking a significant milestone in the enduring relationship between the United States and the Philippines.

This visit of several days coincided with the observance of the Battle of Leyte Gulf, a crucial event in World War II history where U.S. Coast Guardsmen were a significant part of the U.S. forces and among the first to hit the beaches as the U.S. sought to retake the Philippines.

“We are deeply honored to be part of this observance and to strengthen the bond between the United States and the Philippines,” said Lt. Patrick Dreiss, commanding officer of the USCGC Frederick Hatch. “It is a privilege to bring a U.S. Coast Guard Fast Response Cutter to the Philippines for the first time and to visit the historic city of Tacloban. My crew was excited to collaborate with the Philippine Coast Guard to deepen our connections with our fellow seagoing Service and explore this unique city and island.”

An advance team from U.S. Coast Guard District 14 and U.S. Coast Guard Forces Micronesia/Sector Guam held planning meetings in collaboration with the U.S. Embassy to prepare for this visit and the Battle of Leyte Gulf observance. Discussions revolved around mutual capabilities, training opportunities, and community engagement, part of the Coast GGuard'sOperation Blue Pacific mission.

While in Tacloban, the crew, with support from the Maritime Security Response Team West, hosted a subject matter expert exchange on maritime law enforcement with Philippine Coast Guard colleagues, observed the 79th Leyte Gulf Landing Anniversary, hosted local school children and government officials, held working meetings, and experienced the culture of the Eastern Visayas region of the Philippines.

"The expanded capabilities of the Fast Response Cutter represent more than just advanced technology; they symbolize the bridge of cooperation and goodwill between nations. The FRCs and their dedicated crews regularly play a pivotal role in international diplomacy. These vessels, along with their highly trained and professional crews, are ambassadors of peace and collaboration, said Capt. Nick Simmons, commander of U.S. Coast Guard Forces Micronesia/Sector Guam. "They foster understanding and trust across borders, making the seas safer not only for our own nations but for all nations that rely on the freedom of navigation and maritime security."

This visit is part of the USCGC Frederick Hatch's regularly scheduled expeditionary patrol as part of the ongoing Operation Blue Pacific. It follows previous interactions between the U.S. Coast Guard and the Philippine Coast Guard, including the recent arrival of the USCGC Stratton (WMSL 752) in Manila for professional exchanges and joint operations.

The visit of Pacific Area commander Vice Adm. Andrew Tiongson in April to discuss shared challenges and opportunities for

partnership further exemplifies the U.S. Coast Guard’s commitment to the region. The Service’s role as a federal law enforcement agency and an armed forces branch uniquely positions the agency’s teams to conduct security cooperation operations supporting combatant commanders, upholding governance, and ensuring regional stability. Through Operation Blue Pacific, an overarching multi-mission Coast Guard endeavor, the Service seeks to promote security, safety, sovereignty, and economic prosperity in Oceania while strengthening relationships between partner nations in the Pacific.

The Tacloban visit underscores the shared strategic efforts toward a stable and prosperous Indo-Pacific and aligns with the Pacific Area Commander’s goals to prepare a ready force, generate combined effects, and uphold governance. It also supports U.S. Coast Guard District 14 and U.S. Coast Guard Forces Micronesia/Sector Guam’s commitment to be a trusted partner in Oceania and deliver operational excellence.