

# Coast Guard Interdicts Lancha Crews Illegally Fishing U.S. Waters

CORPUS CHRISTI, Texas – Coast Guard law enforcement crews detected and interdicted three Mexican lancha boat crews illegally fishing in federal waters off southern Texas on Feb. 27, the Coast Guard 8th District said in a release.

Coast Guard crews stopped three lanchas with a combined 13 Mexican fishermen engaged in illegal fishing. A total of 3,533 pounds of red snapper and 1,122 pounds of shark was onboard the lanchas. The lancha boats, with fishing gear onboard, were seized. The Mexican fishermen were detained and transferred to border enforcement agents for processing.

A lancha is a slender fishing boat that is 20 to 30 feet long, typically has one outboard motor and is capable of traveling at speeds exceeding 30 mph. Lanchas are frequently used to transport illegal narcotics to the U.S. and fish illegally in the United States' Exclusive Economic Zone near the U.S.-Mexico border in the Gulf of Mexico.

Coast Guard Sector/Air Station Corpus Christi has interdicted 16 lanchas north of the U.S.-Mexico Maritime Border in the month of February and 43 lanchas since Oct. 1, 2018.

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## USCGC Sequoia Returns to Guam

# from Patrol

HONOLULU – The crew of the Coast Guard Cutter Sequoia (WLB 215) returned on Feb. 25 to Apra Harbor, Guam, following a multicutter patrol in response to Super Typhoon Wutip, the Coast Guard 14th District said in a Feb. 28 release.

Wutip was the strongest February storm in the Western Pacific Ocean in 70 years. While underway, the Sequoia led a typhoon avoidance group with the two 110-foot Island Class Patrol Boats from Guam.

“Our mission is two-fold in a situation like Typhoon Wutip,” said Lt. Cmdr. Christian Adams, Sequoia’s commanding officer. “The first is to protect our response capabilities during the storm and conduct emergency search and rescue. This allows us to complete our second mission, to assist in response efforts following the storm’s passing.”

Before the typhoon, Sequoia’s crew was one of the few Coast Guard units underway during the recent government shutdown. Leaving Guam in early January, they traveled over 8,146 statute miles (7,079 nautical miles) to conduct aids to navigation maintenance and replacement in American Samoa and Kwajalein Atoll.

The care of aids to navigation (ATON) is a vital service the crew of the Sequoia provides to the Western Pacific. Their mission ties directly into the commandant’s Maritime Commerce Strategic Outlook released last year. As a maritime nation, the upkeep of ATON ensures commerce continues safely and ensures remote places like American Samoa have access to an ever-expanding world economy. While on patrol the Sequoia crew worked nine floating aids and 11 fixed aids, including three navigation ranges. These are buoys and day boards assisting mariners in the navigation of a free and open Indo-Pacific.

Sequoia’s primary roles have been to assist our partners in

the Pacific in the care of their ATON and, through joint fisheries boardings, enforce conservation and management measures established by the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission. This allows maritime nations in the region to conserve commercial fish stocks and ensures this vital resource remains sustainable for years to come. Due to operations and scheduling this patrol focused on ATON and training in small boat evolutions and buoy deck operations roles. The crew overcame several challenges, including communications issues, engine temperatures and deck equipment.

“I’m proud of this crew for rising to the occasion and completing the mission in an area that is not normally part of our responsibility offering such a complex supply chain,” Adams said.

As a maritime service, the Coast Guard participates in many traditions, some dating back centuries. During the patrol, the cutter made a crossing at the intersection of the Equator and International Dateline and partook in the time-honored tradition of

inducting 36 crewmembers as “Golden Shellbacks.” During a ceremony, the new Golden Shellbacks received a certificate commemorating the event.

“As with all seafarers, there are certain milestones we celebrate as unique and worthy of remembrance honoring our nautical traditions,” Adams said. “Being a Golden Shellback is a fun, unofficial way to celebrate our growth as mariners.”

This patrol aligns with the District 14 plan to provide for continued safety of navigation during the anticipated gap in buoy-tender coverage in the Pacific associated with the midlife maintenance schedule for the 225-foot sea going buoy tenders fleetwide.

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# Fire Breaks Out on Icebreaker Polar Star 650 Miles North of Antarctica

ALAMEDA, Calif. – The 150-member crew of the U.S. Coast Guard Cutter Polar Star fought a fire at about 9 p.m. PST Feb. 10 that broke out in the ship's incinerator room about 650 miles north of McMurdo Sound, Antarctica, the Coast guard Pacific Area said in a Feb 28 release.

After initial response efforts using four fire extinguishers failed, fire crews spent almost two hours putting out the fire. Fire damage was contained inside the incinerator housing, while firefighting water used to cool exhaust pipes in the surrounding area damaged several electrical systems and insulation in the room. Repairs are already being planned for the Polar Star's upcoming maintenance period. The incinerator will need to be fully functional before next year's mission.

No injuries were reported, and the cause of the fire is under investigation.

"It's always a serious matter whenever a shipboard fire breaks out at sea, and it's even more concerning when that ship is in one of the most remote places on Earth," said Vice Adm. Linda Fagan, commander of the U.S. Coast Guard's Pacific Area. "The crew of the Polar Star did an outstanding job – their expert response and determination ensured the safety of everyone aboard."

Commissioned in 1976, the 43-year-old icebreaker is operating beyond its expected 30-year service life. The Polar Star crew recently completed Operation Deep Freeze, an annual joint

military service mission in support of the National Science Foundation, the lead agency for the United States Antarctic Program. Since 1955, U.S. Indo-Pacific Command has assisted in providing air and maritime support throughout the Antarctic continent.

This year marks the 63rd iteration of the annual operation, and the Polar Star crew departed their homeport of Seattle Nov. 27 for their sixth deployment in as many years and traveled more than 11,200 miles to Antarctica.

Upon arrival, the Polar Star broke nearly 17 miles of ice, 6 to 10 feet thick, to open a channel through McMurdo Sound. Once complete, the crew refueled at McMurdo Station, the main U.S. logistics hub in Antarctica. The ship also provided a six-hour familiarization cruise in McMurdo Sound to 156 randomly selected station personnel.

On Jan. 30, the Polar Star escorted the containership Ocean Giant through the channel, enabling a 10-day offload of nearly 500 containers with 10 million pounds of goods that will resupply McMurdo Station, Amundsen-Scott South Pole Station and other U.S. field camps.

The Feb. 10 fire was not the first engineering casualty faced by the Polar Star crew this deployment. While en route to Antarctica, one of the ship's electrical systems began to smoke, causing damage to wiring in an electrical switchboard, and one of

the ship's two evaporators used to make drinkable water failed. The electrical switchboard was repaired by the crew, and the ship's evaporator was repaired after parts were received during a port call in Wellington, New Zealand.

The ship also experienced a leak from the shaft that drives the ship's propeller, which halted icebreaking operations to send scuba divers into the water to repair the seal around the shaft. A hyperbaric chamber on loan from the U.S. Navy aboard

the ship allows Coast Guard divers to make external emergency repairs and inspections of the ship's hull at sea.

The Polar Star also experienced shipwide power outages while breaking ice. Crewmembers spent nine hours shutting down the ship's power plant and rebooting the electrical system to remedy the outages.

The U.S. Coast Guard maintains two icebreakers – the Coast Guard Cutter Healy, which is a medium icebreaker, and the Polar Star, the only U.S. heavy icebreaker. If a catastrophic event, such as getting stuck in the ice, were to happen to the Healy in the Arctic or to the Polar Star near Antarctica, the Coast Guard is left without a self-rescue capability.

Russia by contrast operates more than 40 icebreakers – several of which are nuclear-powered.

Reserved for Operation Deep Freeze each year, the Polar Star spends the Southern Hemisphere summer breaking ice near Antarctica, and when the mission is complete, the Polar Star returns annually to dry dock to complete critical maintenance and repairs in preparation for the next Operation Deep Freeze mission. Once out of dry dock, the ship returns to Antarctica, and the cycle repeats.

The Coast Guard has been the sole provider of the nation's polar icebreaking capability since 1965 and is seeking to increase its icebreaking fleet with six new polar security cutters to ensure continued national presence and access to the Polar Regions.

“While we focus our efforts on creating a peaceful and collaborative environment in the Arctic, we're also responding to the impacts of increased competition in this strategically important region,” Coast Guard Commandant Adm. Karl Schultz said. “Our continued presence will enable us to reinforce positive opportunities and mitigate negative consequences today and tomorrow.”

After leaving Antarctica, the Polar Star crew arrived in New Zealand for a port call, and they are now en route to their homeport of Seattle.

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## **Coast Guard Cutter Vigilant Crew Returns Home After Caribbean Patrol**

CAPE CANAVERAL, Fla. – The crew of the Coast Guard Cutter Vigilant returned home Feb. 26 to Cape Canaveral after a two-month Caribbean patrol.

Vigilant's crew returned to their homeport of Cape Canaveral, concluding a patrol in which the crew enforced U.S. federal laws by conducting numerous boardings throughout the Caribbean while working with other government agencies and international partners to increase national security.

While at sea, the crew disrupted the illegal and perilous voyages of 100 Haitian migrants and ensured their safe return to their home country. Vigilant's crew also saved the lives of three men who had been lost at sea for four days without food and water and returned the survivors to their home country after providing necessary medical attention.

"Maintaining and operating a 54-year-old ship requires great effort and a lot of dedication from everyone onboard," said Cmdr. Jerome Dubay, Vigilant's commanding officer. "This crew continuously meets the challenge, making mission success possible. I am proud of the compassion and professionalism our crewmembers displayed during every boarding and while assisting the migrants back to their country."

The Vigilant is a multimission 210-foot Medium Endurance Cutter whose missions include illegal drug and migrant interdiction as well as search and rescue. The Vigilant patrols throughout the Caribbean basin and Atlantic seaboard to ensure safety of life at sea and enforce international and domestic laws.

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## **Coast Guard Cutter Returns Home After Seizing \$43 Million in Cocaine**

VIRGINIA BEACH, Va. – The crew of Coast Guard Cutter Dependable returned home to Virginia Beach, Va., on Feb. 25 after a 59-day patrol in the eastern Pacific Ocean, the Coast Guard 5th District said in a Feb. 26 release.

While deployed, Dependable's crew aided Joint Interagency Task Force South in conducting counter-drug and alien migrant interdiction operations.

During their patrol, Dependable's boarding team intercepted a go-fast vessel off the coast of Mexico that was specially fitted to smuggle contraband. Once on scene, the boarding team confirmed that the vessel was carrying narcotics along with three suspected drug smugglers. The interdiction resulted in the seizure of about 1,235 pounds of cocaine worth an estimated street value of \$18 million.

Dependable's crew also worked alongside four partner assets to patrol an operational area roughly the size of the U.S. The cutter's crew worked with the U.S. Navy and Customs and Border Protection Maritime Patrol Aircraft to conduct aerial

surveillance alongside other Coast Guard cutters patrolling the region. As a result of these collaborations, Dependable's crew was able to assist Coast Guard Cutter Alert's crew with a transfer of drugs and suspected smugglers apprehended in previous interdictions.

The Dependable crew also leveraged the cutter's embarked Helicopter Interdiction Tactical Squadron (HITRON), the members of which launched in an MH-65 Dolphin helicopter and disrupted a drug-smuggling operation. The squadron seized an estimated 1,653 pounds of cocaine worth about \$25 million and intended for delivery to Mexico.

The Dependable crew sailed 12,904 miles and traveled nearly as far south as the Galapagos Islands and as far west as Acapulco, Mexico. In addition to the cutter's permanent crewmembers, teams from Tactical Law Enforcement Team South, based in Miami, and HITRON, based in Jacksonville, Fla., were aboard for the patrol. Each team provided expertise regarding maritime law enforcement and aerial use of force.

The Virginia Beach-based Cutter Dependable is a 210-foot Reliance-class medium-endurance cutter with a permanent crew of 77. They conduct homeland security missions in the offshore waters of the Western Hemisphere, from New England to the Caribbean Sea and Eastern Pacific.

Having surpassed its 50th year of service to America last November, Dependable and the other 26 medium-endurance cutters are slated for replacement by new Offshore Patrol Cutters beginning in 2021.

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# Coast Guard, Partner Agencies Eradicate Illegal Marijuana Plants in the Bahamas

Andros Island, Bahamas – The Coast Guard, Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) and Bahamian authorities have eradicated more than 200,000 illegal marijuana plants in the Bahamas, the Coast Guard 7th District said in a Feb. 22 release.

On Feb. 6, 2019, a Coast Guard forward-deployed MH-60 Jayhawk helicopter crew from Operation Bahamas, Turks & Caicos (OPBAT) recognized what appeared to be a strong smell of marijuana while flying over Andros Island on a joint narcotic interdiction patrol. The Coast Guard helicopter transported United States DEA agents and Royal Bahamas Police Force Officers from the Drug Enforcement Unit to the area to identify and eradicate over 200,000 marijuana plants.

“The efforts put forth by the Coast Guard, DEA, and the Bahamian Police Force is another success story highlighting the effectiveness of OPBAT’s counter-drug operation,” said Cmdr. Mike Benson, the Coast Guard OPBAT Director.

Approximately 460,000 pounds of marijuana were destroyed.

Operation Bahamas, Turks and Caicos is an international operation between the U.S., the Bahamas, and Turks and Caicos governments to identify, disrupt and dismantle illicit smugglers transiting through the Bahamas.

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# Coast Guard Receives Upgraded HC-144B Aircraft in Corpus Christi, Texas

CORPUS CHRISTI, Texas – The Coast Guard received an upgraded HC-144 medium-range surveillance aircraft at Sector/Air Station Corpus Christi, Texas, Wednesday, the Coast Guard 8th District said in a Feb. 20 release.

The bravo upgrade expands the HC-144's extensive sensor capability, aiding the Coast Guard in its maritime patrol, drug and migrant interdiction, disaster response, and search and rescue missions.

The Coast Guard upgraded the HC-144 aircraft to improve mission effectiveness and situational awareness, as each newly modified aircraft features an updated cockpit control and display unit, navigation and equipment monitoring systems.

The Coast Guard is also integrating the Navy's Minotaur mission system architecture across its fixed-wing aircraft fleet. With the sophisticated command and control system, the aircraft incorporates surveillance and reconnaissance equipment to allow aircrews to gather and process surveillance information that can be transmitted to other platforms and units during flight.

"We are excited to usher in this new command and control suite to support the United States and our complex mission set," said Capt. Edward Gaynor, Sector/Air Station Corpus Christi commanding officer. "Coast Guard Sector/Air Station Corpus Christi looks forward in working with our newly upgraded HC-144 fleet to better support our partners in South Texas."

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# Coast Guard Cuts Ribbon on New Command Center in Maine

BOSTON – Coast Guard Sector Northern New England officially opened a new 24-hour command center Feb. 20 in South Portland, Maine, the Coast Guard 1st District said in a release of the same date.

Sen. Susan Collins, R-Maine, Atlantic Area Commander Vice Adm. Scott Buschman, and First District Commander Rear Adm. Andrew Tiongson were all on hand for the ribbon cutting ceremony. The command center is the hub for all Coast Guard operations across Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont and parts of New York.

Located at Coast Guard Base South Portland, the command center's exterior remained the same, but the interior is completely new. At approximately 1,100 square feet, the space is able to receive alerts of distress any time day or night. The updates to the command center cost nearly \$400,000 and were part of a larger \$2.3 million upgrade to the base. The command center updates included new furniture, electronics, central air conditioning, a generator, and improved Rescue 21 reliability to continue assisting mariners across the area.

Acting as central command and control for operations across four states, the command center, along with its staff and equipment, are essential to Coast Guard missions such as search and rescue, marine environmental protection and port and waterway security.

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# **Coast Guard Cutter Dauntless Returns Home after Caribbean Patrol**

NEW ORLEANS – The Coast Guard Cutter Dauntless returned home to Pensacola, Florida, after completing a 59-day patrol in the Caribbean Sea, the Coast Guard 8th District said in a Feb. 14 release.

During the patrol, Dauntless conducted joint operations with Department of Homeland Security air and surface assets to intercept over 80 migrants heading for U.S. soil, conducted four medical evacuations at sea saving nine lives, and assisted in a drug interdiction seizure.

The crew of the Dauntless supported Operation Unified Resolve, a combined effort between Joint Interagency Task Force South, Coast Guard and international partners in the Caribbean region. The emphasis of the operation focused on interdicting vessels smuggling drugs and illegal migrants to the United States, which resulted in the seizure of 640 kilograms of cocaine and detention of two smugglers as part of a joint mission effort with U.S. Customs Border Protection.

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## **Coast Guard Interdicts 24 Migrants off Mona Island,**

# Puerto Rico

SAN JUAN, Puerto Rico – The crew of the Coast Guard Cutter Tahoma (WPC-908) repatriated 20 of 24 Dominican migrants to a Dominican Republic Navy vessel Feb. 11 just off Samana, Dominican Republic, following the interdiction of a makeshift boat Feb. 9, approximately five nautical miles west of Mona Island, Puerto Rico, the Coast Guard 7th District said in a Feb. 11 release.

Four men among the interdicted migrants are facing possible federal prosecution by the U.S. Attorney's Office for the District of Puerto Rico for illegally attempting to reenter the United States.

Since October 2018, Coast Guard, federal and Puerto Rico law enforcement partners have interdicted at least 969 migrants and stopped several narcotics smuggling attempts throughout the Sector San Juan area of responsibility.

“Despite challenging conditions, the Coast Guard crews involved in this event utilized their training and expertise to successfully rescue all 24 people from the unseaworthy vessel,” said Lt. Cmdr. Matthew Haddad, Sector San Juan chief of enforcement. “These illegal maritime migration voyages are extremely dangerous and put the safety of those onboard in great jeopardy. The Coast Guard, in conjunction with our partners, remain poised to intercept these smuggling events in an effort to prevent the unnecessary loss of life.”

The crew of a Coast Guard HC-144 Ocean Sentry aircraft from Air Station Miami, while on a routine patrol of the Mona Passage, detected a 22-foot makeshift wooden boat late Friday night with an undetermined number of passengers aboard transiting towards Puerto Rico. The migrants were continuously bailing out water to prevent their vessel from sinking.

The Coast Guard Cutter Joseph Tezanos (WPC-118) diverted and

interdicted the migrant vessel Saturday morning, when the crew embarked all 24 migrants, 20 men and four women, and destroyed the migrant boat as a hazard to navigation. Afterwards, the migrants were embarked aboard Coast Guard Cutter Richard Dixon (WPC-1113) and then to the Coast Guard Tahoma (WMEC-908) for their repatriation. The crew of the Tahoma completed the transfer of the four detained migrants Sunday to Border Patrol agents in Mayaguez, Puerto Rico.

Following at-sea interdictions, illegal migrants stopped are repatriated to their country of origin or returned to their place of departure. In some cases, those migrants found to have a criminal history with possible connection to smuggling operations are turned over to law enforcement authorities for further prosecution by the Department of Justice. Once aboard a Coast Guard cutter, all migrants receive food, water, shelter and basic medical attention.

The Joseph Tezanos and Richard Dixon are 154-foot fast response cutters homeported in San Juan, Puerto Rico, while the Tahoma is a 270-foot medium endurance cutter based out of Portsmouth Naval Shipyard in Kittery, Maine. The new Offshore Patrol Cutter will eventually replace Tahoma and other ships in its

class, which will be able to carry out Coast Guard missions with greater endurance and interoperability with military and federal partners.