

Coast Guard Offloads Over \$133.5 Million in Illicit Drugs Interdicted in Eastern Pacific Ocean



The crew of USCGC Seneca (WMEC 906) stand for a photo during a drug offload at Port Everglades in Fort Lauderdale, Florida, Feb. 30, 2025. The crew offloaded more than 17,750 pounds of illicit narcotics worth more than \$133 million as a result of four interdictions in the international waters of the Eastern Pacific Ocean. (U.S. Coast Guard photo by Petty Officer 2nd Class Eric Rodriguez)

[From Coast Guard Southeast District](#)

MIAMI – U.S. Coast Guard Cutter Seneca’s crew offloaded approximately 17,750 pounds of cocaine worth more than \$133.5 million in Port Everglades, Feb 13.

The seized contraband was the result of four interdictions in international waters of the Eastern Pacific Ocean.

On Jan. 25, Seneca's crew detected a go-fast vessel, and the embarked Helicopter Interdiction Tactical Squadron air crew employed airborne use of force tactics. Seneca's boarding team interdicted and boarded the vessel, seizing 4,410 pounds of cocaine.

On Jan. 31, Seneca's crew detected three go-fast vessels, and the embarked HITRON air crew employed airborne use of force tactics. Seneca's boarding team interdicted and boarded all three vessels, seizing 13,340 pounds of cocaine.

"I am extremely proud of the crew's incredible performance and adaptability during this deployment," said Capt. Lee Jones, commanding officer, Coast Guard Cutter Seneca. "This deployment demonstrates our enhanced posture and continued success in the fight against narco-terrorism and transnational criminal organizations. The Coast Guard, in conjunction with our inter-agency and international partners, continues to patrol areas commonly associated with drug trafficking in the Eastern Pacific, denying smugglers access to maritime routes by which they move illicit drugs to our U.S. land and sea borders."

The following assets and crews were involved in the interdiction operations:

- [Coast Guard Cutter Seneca](#)

- Coast Guard Helicopter Interdiction Tactical Squadron

- [Joint Interagency Task Force-South](#)

- [Coast Guard Southeast District watchstanders](#)
- [Coast Guard Southwest District watchstanders](#)

[80% of interdictions of U.S.-bound drugs occur at sea. This underscores the importance of maritime interdiction in combatting the flow of illegal narcotics and protecting American communities from this deadly threat.](#) U.S. Southern Command's Joint Interagency Task Force-South based in Key West conducts the detection and monitoring of aerial and maritime transit of illegal drugs. Once interdiction becomes imminent, the law enforcement phase of the operation begins, and control of the operation shifts to the U.S. Coast Guard throughout the interdiction and apprehension. Interdictions in the Eastern Pacific Ocean are performed by members of the U.S. Coast Guard under the authority and control of the [Coast Guard's Southwest District](#), headquartered in Alameda, California.

To protect the Homeland from ongoing trafficking of illicit narcotics from South America to the United States, the Coast Guard is accelerating our counter-drug operations in the Eastern Pacific Ocean in support of Operation Pacific Viper.

The Coast Guard continues increased operations to interdict, seize and disrupt transshipments of cocaine and other bulk illicit drugs by sea. These drugs fuel and enable cartels and transnational criminal organizations to produce and traffic illegal fentanyl, threatening the United States.

These interdictions deny criminal organizations illicit revenue. They provide critical testimonial and drug evidence as well as key intelligence for their total elimination. These interdictions relate to Homeland Security Taskforce Tampa, investigations in support of Operation Take Back America, which identifies, disrupts, and dismantles the highest-level criminal organizations that threaten the United States using a prosecutor-led, intelligence-driven, multi-

agency approach.

Coast Guard Cutter Seneca is a 270-foot medium-endurance cutter homeported in Portsmouth, Virginia, under U.S. Coast Guard Atlantic Area Command.

Coast Guard Commissions USCGC Frederick Mann in Kodiak, Alaska



The Coast Guard Cutter Frederick Mann (WPC 1160) displays signal flags after the cutter's commissioning ceremony at Coast Guard Base Kodiak, Alaska, Feb. 13, 2026. The commissioning solidified the Mann as the sixth fast response cutter to be homeported in Alaska, and it was

presided over by Rear Adm. Bob Little, commander of the Coast Guard's Arctic District. (U.S. Coast Guard photo by Petty Officer 3rd Class Cameron Snell)

[From Coast Guard Arctic District Public Affairs](#)

KODIAK, Alaska – The Coast Guard commissioned its newest and sixth Arctic District Fast Response Cutter (FRC), Coast Guard Cutter Frederick Mann (WPC 1160), for official entry into its service fleet during a ceremony held in Kodiak, Friday, Feb. 13.

The ceremony was presided over by Rear Adm. Bob Little, commander of the Arctic District. Members of the Mann family were also in attendance, including the cutter's sponsor, Mrs. Eugenia "Jeannie" Mann Hyder, niece of Frederick Mann.

"Commissioning the Frederick Mann increases U.S. strength and ensures control of our maritime borders and approaches," said Little. "This crew will honor their motto – courage through fire—as they serve in the U.S. Arctic and Alaska."

The Mann is the Coast Guard's 60th FRC and the third to be homeported at Coast Guard Base Kodiak. The crew of the Mann will primarily serve in and around the Aleutian Islands, Bering Sea, Gulf of Alaska, and North Pacific Ocean. The cutter is designed for missions such as search and rescue; fishery patrols; drug and migrant interdiction; national defense; and ports, waterways, and coastal security.

Chief Warrant Officer Frederick Mann was born in Atlee, Virginia, Oct. 14, 1918, and enlisted in the Coast Guard in 1939.

During World War II, Mann's ship, the USS George F. Elliott, participated in the initial landings of Guadalcanal on Aug. 7, 1942. The following day, Japanese bombers attacked the landing fleet and a bomber aircraft crashed into his ship, spilling

fuel across the decks and setting the ship on fire.

Mann carried a fire hose into the burning ammunition compartment and pumped water into the space. Despite a lack of oxygen, suffocating smoke, and super-heated bulkheads, Mann re-entered the compartment to ensure the hose was dousing the fire and filling the compartment properly. His immediate actions prevented the space from detonating and causing more casualties aboard the Elliot.

As a direct result, the vessel continued to burn overnight without the ammunition detonating, and everyone was able to safely evacuate the vessel. For his heroic actions, Mann was awarded the Gold Life Saving Medal, and also received the Silver Star medal and the Presidential Unit Citation.

Afterward, Mann returned stateside and served a total of 31 years at a variety of units including captain-of-the-port (COPT) stations and lifeboat stations on the Great Lakes, East Coast, and Gulf Coast. He also served aboard the cutters Bibb and General Greene, buoy tenders Myrtle, Oak, White Pine, and finally Narcissus, which he commanded.

Mann met his wife, the former Winnie Knox, who served as a SPAR at COTP Miami at the same time as he did. Fred and Winnie retired to Bayview, Texas, near his last duty station at Port Isabel. They were married for 54 years.

Coast Guard veteran and war hero Chief Warrant Officer Frederick Dean Mann passed away at the age of 98 on Jan. 9, 2017.

The Coast Guard has ordered a series of new FRCs to replace the 1980s-era Island-class 110-foot patrol boats. Supported by historic investments made possible through President Trump's One Big Beautiful Bill Act, the legislation provides nearly \$25 billion – the largest single funding commitment in Coast Guard history – including \$1

billion dollars for additional FRCs. This commissioning follows the commissioning of USCGC Storis (WAGB 21) in August, which is the Coast Guard's first polar ice breaker acquisition in over 25 years. The Arctic District is scheduled to acquire two new Offshore Patrol Cutters in the near future.

The FRCs feature advanced command, control, communications, computers, intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance equipment, and over-the-horizon cutter boat deployment, enhancing the Coast Guard's operations to control, secure, and defend the U.S. border and maritime approaches. These new assets and capabilities continue the Coast Guard's modernization through Force Design 2028, an initiative introduced by Secretary of Homeland Security Kristi Noem to transform the Coast Guard into a more agile, capable and responsive fighting force.

The commissioning ceremony is a traditional milestone in the life of a cutter that marks its entry into active service and represents the cutter's readiness to conduct Coast Guard operations.

Australia, Philippines, and U.S. Conduct a Multilateral Maritime Cooperative Activity



From front, Philippine Coast Guard Teresa Magbanua-class patrol vessel BRP Teresa Magbanua (MRRV 9701), Royal Australian Navy Anzac-class frigate HMAS Toowoomba (FFH 156), U.S. Navy Arleigh Burke-class guided-missile destroyer USS Dewey (DDG 105) and Philippine Navy Jose Miguel Malvar-class guided-missile frigate BRP Diego Silang (FFG 07) sail in formation during the Maritime Cooperative Activity (MCA) in the Philippines' Exclusive Economic Zone, Feb. 16, 2026. (U.S. Navy photo by MC2 Class Oscar Diaz)

[By U.S. 7th Fleet Public Affairs](#)

SOUTH CHINA SEA – The combined armed forces of Australia, the Philippines, and the United States, demonstrated a collective commitment to strengthen regional and international cooperation in support of a free and open Indo-Pacific while conducting a multilateral Maritime Cooperative Activity (MCA) within the Philippines' Exclusive Economic Zone, Feb. 15-16, 2026.

As the first multilateral MCA of 2026, this event built on previous MCAs and our continuous operations

together, which strengthen the interoperability of our armed and defense forces and their doctrines, tactics, techniques, and procedures. This MCA focused on conducting visual information drills and replenishment-at-sea.

MCAs are conducted in a manner consistent with international law and with due regard to the safety, navigational rights, and freedoms of all nations.

Participating units included Royal Australian Navy Anzac-class frigate HMAS Toowoomba (FFH 156), Royal Australian Air Force P-8A Poseidon maritime patrol and reconnaissance aircraft, Philippine Navy Jose Miguel Malvar-class guided missile frigate BRP Diego Silang (FFG 7), AW109 helicopter, Philippine Air Force's FA-50 fighter jets, A-29 Super Tucano, C-208B, a Sokol Search and Rescue helicopter, Philippine Coast Guard Teresa Magbanua-class patrol vessel BRP Teresa Magbanua (MRRV 9701), U.S. Navy Arleigh Burke-class guided-missile destroyer USS Dewey (DDG 105), and a P-8A Poseidon assigned to Patrol Squadron (VP) 4.

The U.S., along with our allies and partners, upholds the right to freedom of navigation and overflight and other lawful uses of the sea and international airspace, and respect for all nations' maritime rights under international law.

U.S. 7th Fleet is the U.S. Navy's largest forward-deployed numbered fleet and routinely interacts and operates with allies and partners in preserving a free and open Indo-Pacific region.

U.S. Coast Guard Completes the President's Contract Awards for 11 Arctic Security Cutters



Digital Render of Arctic Security Cutter
[From U.S. Coast Guard Headquarters](#)

WASHINGTON – The U.S. Coast Guard announced today it has completed the award of contracts for 11 Arctic Security Cutters, fulfilling President Trump's directive to rapidly expand America's icebreaker fleet. The latest award is for construction of up to five Arctic Security Cutters, bringing the President's initial order to completion and marking a historic milestone in U.S. Arctic capability.

The contract awarded today builds on previous awards announced [Dec 29, 2025](#), and delivers the 11 Arctic Security Cutters directed by the President. Together, these cutters will form the backbone of a revitalized U.S. icebreaker fleet,

protecting U.S. sovereignty and dominance in the Arctic.

“America has been an Arctic nation for over 150 years, and we’re finally acting like it under President Trump. Our adversaries continue to look to grow their presence in the Arctic, equipping the Coast Guard with Arctic Security Cutters will help reassert American maritime dominance there,” said Secretary Kristi Noem. “Revitalizing the U.S. Coast Guard’s icebreaking capabilities is crucial for our security and prosperity, and today’s announcement is an important step in that direction.”

Davie Defense, Inc. will construct two Arctic Security Cutters at Helsinki Shipyard in Finland and three domestically. The Arctic Security Cutters will defend U.S. sovereignty, secure critical shipping lanes, protect energy and mineral resources, and counter foreign malign influence in the Arctic region. A robust icebreaker fleet will enable the Coast Guard to control, secure and defend U.S. Alaskan borders and Arctic maritime approaches, facilitate maritime commerce vital to economic prosperity and strategic mobility, and respond to crises and contingencies in the region.

“Awarding these contracts ensures the United States maintains its leadership as a maritime power in the Arctic,” said Adm. Kevin E. Lunday, commandant of the Coast Guard. “Accelerating construction of these cutters will enable the Coast Guard to defend our northern border and approaches, while strengthening domestic shipbuilding and reinforcing the nation’s industrial base.”

Delivery of the first Arctic Security Cutter is expected in early 2028.

Acquisition of Arctic Security Cutters supports the Coast Guard’s modernization under [Force Design 2028](#), transforming the Service into a more agile, capable and responsive fighting force.

Coast Guard, CBP, Homeland Security Task Force Partners Apprehend Stowaway Smuggler



From U.S. Coast Guard Southeast District, Feb. 9, 2026

SAN JUAN, Puerto Rico – Coast Guard Station San Juan and Sector San Juan Boarding Team members working with Homeland

Security Task Force – San Juan Region partner agencies apprehended a stowaway smuggler and seized 10 bales of cocaine in San Juan Harbor, Puerto Rico, Jan. 28, 2026.

The seized contraband weighed a combined total of 358kgs/789.25 pounds and is estimated to have a wholesale value of more than \$5 million. The apprehended suspect faces federal prosecution on drug trafficking charges.

Sector San Juan Command Center watchstanders received a VHF Channel 16 marine radio communication from inbound Tug vessel Signet Thunder at approximately 5:48 a.m., Jan. 28, 2026, while the vessel was towing the barge San Juan-JaxBridge to the Old Army Terminal port facility in San Juan Harbor. The tug Signet Thunder reported that a crewmember from an assist tugboat had boarded the barge and sighted a stowaway onboard. The tugboat further relayed they would hold position and wait for assistance. Watchstanders directed Station San Juan to launch and alerted Customs and Border Protection's Caribbean Air and Marine Branch and Office of Field Operations, and Puerto Rico Police Joint Forces of Rapid Action marine units which also responded.

Watchstanders issued an Urgent Marine Information Broadcast to advise vessel traffic to be on the lookout for distress. Shortly thereafter, the Station San Juan boat crew sighted and recovered one person and 10 bales of suspected contraband from the water. Once pier side, Sector Boarding Team and Customs and Border Protection Office of Field Operations officers completed a boarding of the Signet Thunder and the barge and found no other stowaways or contraband onboard. The suspect and seized contraband were transferred to Homeland Security Task Force-San Juan law enforcement partners at Coast Guard Base San Juan, Puerto Rico.

“This case highlights a great response and interoperability between Coast Guard, Customs and Border Protection, and Puerto Rico Police responding units and the strong collaboration

within Homeland Security Task Force – San Juan partner agencies to secure the nation’s Eastern Caribbean maritime borders from illicit drug trafficking,” said Cmdr. Matthew Romano. Sector San Juan chief of response. “We commend the actions of the tugboat Signet Thunder which reflect positively on the maritime community and the important role they play in safeguarding our nation’s navigable waterways. We are proud to stand the watch alongside our Department of Homeland Security, Department of Justice and our local law enforcement partners as we continue to combat illicit trafficking throughout the waters of Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands.”

The Coast Guard is part of a whole-of-government approach to protect our maritime approaches in the Eastern Caribbean and secure our nation’s borders by interdicting drug smuggling activities at sea and dismantling Foreign Terrorist Organizations (FTO) and Transnational Criminal Organizations (TCO), including narco-trafficking and human smuggling operations.

U.S. Coast Guard Marks 200,000 Pounds of Cocaine Seized in Operation Pacific Viper



From U.S. Coast Guard Headquarters, Feb. 5, 2026

WASHINGTON – The U.S. Coast Guard announced Thursday it has seized more than 200,000 pounds of cocaine in the Eastern Pacific Ocean since launching Operation Pacific Viper in early

August.

The Coast Guard reached this milestone following recent interdictions of 13,337 pounds of cocaine by Coast Guard Cutter Seneca and 13,263 pounds by Coast Guard Cutter Robert Ward.

“Operation Pacific Viper has proven to be a crucial weapon in the fight against foreign drug traffickers and cartels in Latin America and has sent a clear message that we will disrupt, dismantle, and destroy their deadly business exploits wherever we find it,” said U.S. Department of Homeland Security Secretary Kristi Noem. “The more than 75 million lethal doses seized during this operation will never reach our schools and neighborhoods to poison our children or tear apart American families. In cutting off the flow of these deadly drugs, the Coast Guard is saving American lives and delivering on President Trump’s promise to Make America Safe Again and reestablish our maritime dominance.”

With 1.2 grams of cocaine being a potentially lethal dose, the total seized through Operation Pacific Viper equates to more than 75 million potentially deadly doses kept off U.S. streets. Eighty percent of all seizures of U.S.-bound narcotics occur at sea, underscoring the impact of Coast Guard maritime interdiction efforts.

“Each Coast Guard drug seizure far from our borders prevents deadly drugs from reaching our communities and disrupts the profit that fuels narco-terrorists,” said Admiral Kevin Lunday, Commandant of the U.S. Coast Guard. “The success of Operation Pacific Viper proves that we own the sea, and the proficiency, vigilance, and heart of our crews is our greatest strength.”

Since its inception, Operation Pacific Viper has accelerated counter-drug operations in the Eastern Pacific, a primary corridor for narcotics smuggling from Central and South

America. The Coast Guard has surged cutters, aircraft and tactical teams to interdict, seize and disrupt the flow of cocaine and other illicit drugs. These efforts are a critical component of the broader U.S. strategy to combat narco-terrorism and dismantle transnational criminal organizations.

Recent operations have highlighted the effectiveness of this approach, including record-setting interdictions. In December, [the Coast Guard marked a significant achievement by seizing 150,000 pounds of cocaine and interdicting a drug smuggling vessel carrying more than 20,000 pounds of cocaine](#), highlighting the sustained effectiveness of Operation Pacific Viper.

The Coast Guard's persistent operations and rapid response have resulted in record seizure amounts, denying criminal organizations billions in illicit revenue and preventing the flow of dangerous drugs into American communities.

Detecting and interdicting narco-terrorism on the high seas involves significant interagency and international coordination. U.S. Southern Command's Joint Interagency Task Force-South, based in Key West, Florida, detects and monitors both aerial and maritime transit of illegal drugs. Once interdiction becomes imminent, the law enforcement phase of the operation begins, and control of the operation shifts to the U.S. Coast Guard throughout the interdiction and apprehension. Interdictions in the Eastern Pacific Ocean are performed by members of the U.S. Coast Guard under the authority and control of the Coast Guard's Southwest District, headquartered in Alameda, California.

The Coast Guard is the United States' lead federal agency for maritime drug interdiction. We are part of the Department of Homeland Security team protecting our nation and are at all times a military service and part of the joint force defending it.

Coast Guard Takes Delivery of 18th Mission-Ready HC-130J Surveillance Aircraft



WASHINGTON – A newly delivered mission-ready Coast Guard HC-130J long range surveillance aircraft enhances mission readiness by providing advanced surveillance, command and control capabilities, and real-time information sharing with operational forces. With its extended range and endurance, the HC-130J plays a vital role in securing U.S. borders and maritime approaches, supporting commerce, and responding to emergencies. (U.S. Coast Guard courtesy photo)

[Release From U.S. Coast Guard Headquarters](#)

WASHINGTON – The Coast Guard is completing final delivery activities this week for its 18th fully missionized HC-130J long range surveillance aircraft, designated CGNR 2018, at L3Harris Integrated Mission Systems in Waco, Texas. The aircraft will support the transition of Air Station Sacramento, California, from C-27J aircraft to HC-130Js.

Three Coast Guard air stations currently operate the HC-130J: Elizabeth City, North Carolina; Kodiak, Alaska; and Barbers Point, Hawaii. The addition of CGNR 2018 marks a step toward expanding HC-130J operations to two additional air stations, beginning with Sacramento later this year.

The Coast Guard received \$1.142 billion in the One Big Beautiful Bill Act (OBBBA) for procurement and acquisition of fixed-wing aircraft, including HC-130Js. The investment, combined with early delivery of CGNR 2018, enables the long-range surveillance fleet to expand operations.

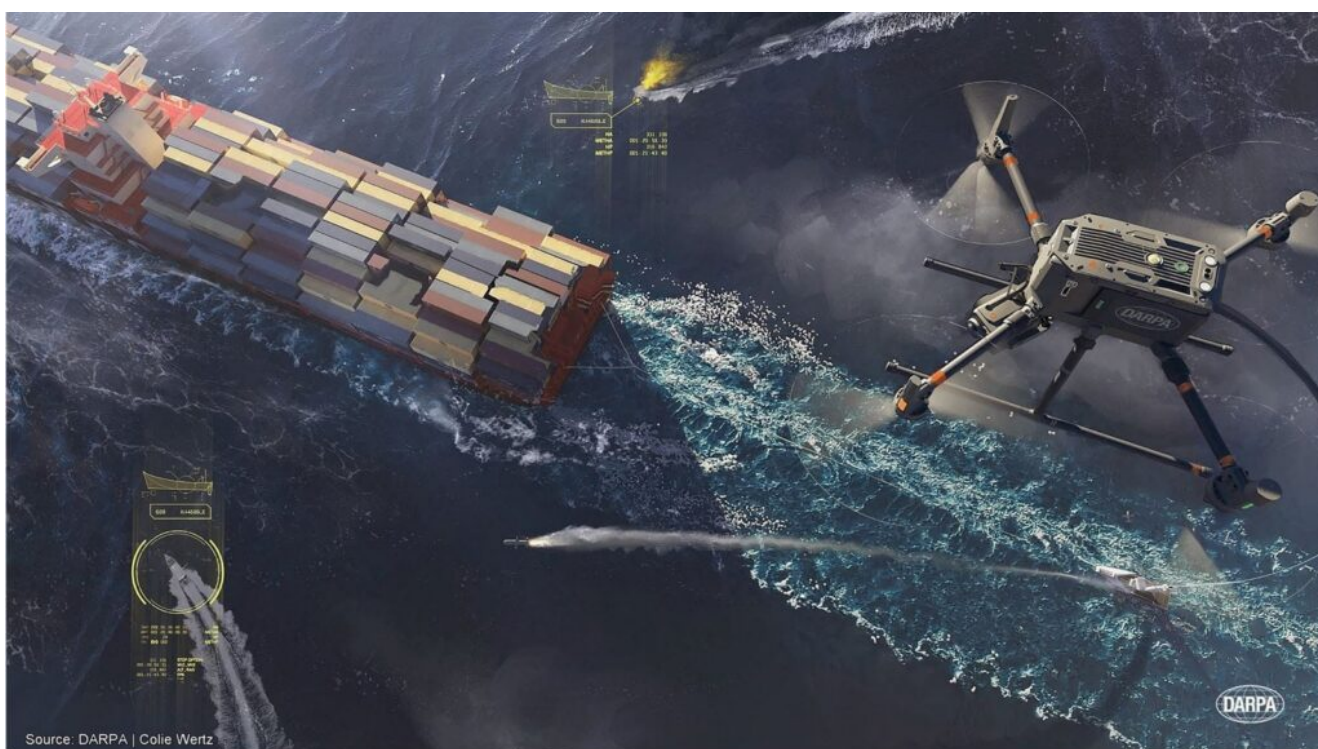
L3Harris executes missionization of the baseline C-130J aircraft, integrating the Minotaur Mission System Suite, Coast Guard-specific multi-mode radar, sensors and communication systems. Additional capabilities, including enhanced approach and landing systems, expanded diagnostics and civil GPS, were integrated as part of a Block Upgrade 8.1 installation.

Including funds from OBBBA, the Coast Guard has appropriations for a total of 25 HC-130J aircraft, one HC-130J simulator, initial spare parts inventory and site activation for two additional air stations.

The HC-130J fleet serves as an on-scene command and control platform or surveillance platform, with the means to detect, classify and identify objects and share information with operational forces. The aircraft has a cruise speed of 320 knots, a range of 4,900 nautical miles and endurance of more than 20 hours.

The missionized HC-130J enables the Coast Guard to control, secure and defend the U.S. border and maritime approaches, facilitate commerce and respond to crises or contingencies.

RTX's Raytheon Selected by DARPA to Develop Advanced Maritime Defense Technologies



[Release From RTX](#)

New capability will protect vulnerable vessels from threats at sea

PORTSMOUTH, R.I., (February 2, 2026) – Raytheon, an RTX (NYSE: RTX) business, has been selected by the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA) to develop an advanced

sensing and targeting system that will help defend vulnerable commercial shipping and naval logistics vessels against emerging threats such as unmanned surface vehicles (USVs).

Under the contract, Raytheon's [Advanced Technology](#) team will design, build, and demonstrate a system that consists of Electro-Optical/Infrared (EO/IR) sensors, advanced detection software, and robust command and control capabilities to enhance situational awareness and threat response.

The system, which is being developed for DARPA's Pulling Guard program, will deploy the sensors via a tethered drone connected to a semi-autonomous unmanned platform that is towed by commercial and naval logistics vessels. The sensors will provide real-time target tracking data to remote operators, enabling them to make rapid, informed engagement decisions.

Phase one of the program will focus on simulated engagements to evaluate system performance and operator workflows. In phase two, the system will transition to integrating operational launchers and effectors for live operations.

"Through this development, we are advancing critical security technologies for commercial shipping in regions like the Red Sea," said Colin Whelan, president of Advanced Technology at Raytheon. "By integrating our proven expertise in command and control, high-performance sensing, and effectors, we will deliver a scalable, cost-effective solution that minimizes risks to both cargo and naval assets."

Beyond its primary focus of vulnerable ship protection, the technology Raytheon is developing has the potential to deliver broader capabilities across a wide range of naval and security operations, including automated overwatch for medium and large USVs and manned combatants operating in multiple theaters.

Coast Guard Gearing Up to Absorb Massive Investment, Commandant Says



Artist rendering of the Arctic Security Cutter (Bollinger)
By Richard R. Burgess, Senior Editor

ARLINGTON, Va. – With nearly \$25 billion in reconciliation funding from Congress, the U.S. Coast Guard is moving out on some new programs and adding to others as it prepares for an expansion in numbers of cutters, aircraft, bases, and personnel, the Coast Guard's commandant told Congress.

Adm. Kevin Lunday, commandant of the Coast Guard, testifying Jan. 29, 2026, before the Senate Committee on Commerce,

Science, and Transportation, said the reconciliation law passed in 2025 was the “most significant investment in Coast Guard history.”

Lunday told the committee that with the expanded force bought with the reconciliation law, the service would need congressional support for consistent, sustained funding to operate it.

The Coast Guard recently has awarded contracts to build six Arctic Security Cutters (ASCs) with plans to build a total of 11. Lunday said that – of the first six – four will be built in the United States by Bollinger Shipyards and two in Finland by Rauma Marine Construction Oy. The new icebreakers are based on the Multi-Purpose Icebreaker design by Seaspan Shipyards of Vancouver, Canada, developed with Aker Arctic Technology Inc of Helsinki, Finland. In service, the ASCs would greatly expand the Arctic capabilities of the Coast Guard.

The reconciliation law also funds 22 cutters, including three of the six contracted ASCs, nine new Offshore Patrol Cutters and 10 additional fast response cutters (FRCs), bringing the FRC program total to 77 cutters.

Lunday said the Coast Guard has requested information from the defense industry regarding a new class of light and medium icebreakers to replace old icebreaking tugs. These cutters would be built in the United States, he said.

The commandant also said that a second Great Lakes Icebreaker was one of his top priorities.

He affirmed that the first Polar Security Cutter is on track for delivery in 2030.

The Coast Guard also is procuring six additional HC-130J Super Hercules maritime patrol aircraft and 40 additional MH-60 Jayhawk helicopters. The additional MH-60s will enable the

service to replace MH-65 Dolphin helicopters and to have more MH-60s to deploy on the expanding force of cutters including Polar Security Cutters.

Lunday said the reconciliation law will enable the Coast Guard to accelerate phaseout of its MH-65 helicopter fleet before the originally planned retirement year of 2037.

The law also added procurement of some MQ-9 Reaper unmanned aerial vehicles.

Under the Force Design 2028, the Coast Guard is expanding its force by 15,000 personnel. Lunday pointed out that 13,000 personnel will be needed to crew the 11 Arctic Security Cutters.

U.S. Coast Guard Cutter Polar Star Marks 50 years of Service, Begins Operation Deep Freeze 2026



<https://www.news.uscg.mil/Press-Releases/Article/4385905/us-coast-guard-cutter-polar-star-marks-50-years-of-service-begins-operation-dee>/Caption: USCGC Polar Star (WAGB 10) crew members pose for a group photo while the cutter sits hove-to in the Ross Sea during Operation Deep Freeze 2026, Jan. 12, 2026. The cutter turned 50 years old on Jan. 17, 2026 amid Operation Deep Freeze, which is a joint service, inter-agency support operation for the National Science Foundation that manages the United States Antarctic Program. (U.S. Coast Guard photo by Petty Officer 2nd Class Christopher Bokum)

From U.S. Coast Guard Pacific Area, Jan. 23, 2026

SOUTHERN OCEAN – The U.S. Coast Guard Cutter Polar Star (WAGB 10) began icebreaking operations in the Southern Ocean in support of Operation Deep Freeze 2026 and marked its 50th year of commissioned service Saturday by freeing and escorting a cruise ship trapped in pack ice.

The Australian-owned cruise ship Scenic Eclipse II contacted Polar Star at approximately 11 p.m., local time Friday after becoming beset in pack ice roughly eight nautical miles from McMurdo Sound. [Polar Star's crew conducted two close passes to](#)

[break the vessel free](#), then escorted it approximately four nautical miles to open water.

Polar Star [departed Seattle in November](#) for its 29th deployment to Antarctica in support of Operation Deep Freeze.

Operation Deep Freeze provides logistical support for the U.S. Antarctic Program, which is managed by the National Science Foundation. The mission includes strategic and tactical airlift, airdrop, aeromedical evacuation, search and rescue, sealift, seaport access, bulk fuel supply, cargo handling, and other transportation requirements. These efforts enable critical scientific research in one of the most remote regions on Earth.

Polar Star's role in Operation Deep Freeze includes [breaking a navigable channel through miles of dense Antarctic ice](#) to allow fuel and cargo deliveries essential for sustaining research stations and operations.

Commissioned Jan. 17, 1976, Polar Star is the nation's only active heavy icebreaker and has served as a cornerstone of U.S. presence in the polar regions. For five decades, the cutter has executed missions ranging from Antarctic resupply and search and rescue to environmental protection and national defense.

As the cutter transits the Southern Ocean en route to Antarctica, its crew reflects on a half-century of service defined by resilience, adaptability and dedication.

"I am constantly amazed at this crew's tremendous energy and enthusiasm," said Capt. Jeff Rasnake, Polar Star's commanding officer. "Despite the many challenges associated with getting and keeping this ship on mission, they remain eternally positive and committed to meeting the high standards we've set for ourselves."

Throughout its service life, Polar Star has completed dozens

of Operation Deep Freeze missions and numerous Arctic deployments, defending U.S. sovereignty, securing critical shipping lanes, protecting energy and mineral resources, and countering our adversaries' presence in the polar regions. Despite its age, the cutter continues to demonstrate unmatched heavy icebreaking capability, routinely operating in conditions few vessels can navigate.

"At 50 years old, Polar Star remains the world's most capable non-nuclear icebreaker," said Cmdr. Samuel Blase, Polar Star's executive officer. "That's a testament to the crews that have maintained it over the decades. With years of service left to give, Polar Star will continue to guide the way in the high latitudes well into the future."

As the cutter undertakes another demanding deployment, its 50th anniversary underscores both the ship's enduring capabilities and the professionalism of its crew.

"While the term 'historic' has lost meaning through overuse, there is no doubt that this is an amazing ship," said Rasnake. "Polar Star's 50 years of service in the polar regions puts it in the discussion with other great Coast Guard icebreakers such as USCGC Glacier, whose record of Operation Deep Freeze deployments Polar Star matches this year."

As Polar Star presses south through freezing seas and thickening ice, the crew carries forward a proud tradition of service. The 50th anniversary serves as both a celebration of the past and a reminder of the cutter's ongoing role at the forefront of U.S. polar operations.