

Coast Guard Cutter Joseph Gerczak Returns Home Following 37-Day Law Enforcement Patrol in American Samoa



U.S. Coast Guard Petty Officer 1st Class Kyle Cassidy, a boatswain's mate assigned to Coast Guard Cutter Joseph Gerczak (WPC 1126), monitors the cutter's approach of Pago Pago, American Samoa, Feb. 5, 2025. (U.S. Coast Guard photo by Petty Officer 1st Class Steven Zea)

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HONOLULU – The crew of the U.S. Coast Guard Cutter Joseph Gerczak (WPC 1126) returned home to Honolulu Saturday following a 37-day territorial integrity patrol along the U.S.

maritime border in American Samoa.

The Joseph Gerczak crew departed Coast Guard Base Honolulu in January and traveled more than 7,300 nautical miles spanning from the Hawaiian Islands to American Samoa.

The crew patrolled the U.S. territorial maritime border and safeguarded the U.S. Exclusive Economic Zone surrounding American Samoa, which extends up to 200 miles offshore.

During the patrol, the crew conducted boardings on two U.S.-flagged fishing vessels to ensure the territorial integrity of the U.S. maritime border and deter any threat of illicit trafficking. The crew also ensured the safety of the U.S. fishing fleet by reviewing the vessels' documentation, examining the captains' permits and inspecting the vessels' required safety equipment, fishing gear and, when applicable, the on-board catch. The crew worked alongside a National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration Office of Law Enforcement Officer, who assisted the boarding team in identifying two living marine resource violations for which the vessel was cited.

The cutter's boarding teams observed 10 total violations, including a non-U.S. master who was neither a U.S. citizen nor U.S. national, expired documentation, an expired survival craft, expired hydrostatic releases for emergency position indicating radio beacons, expired flares, unsatisfactory condition of life jackets, and damaged turtle mitigation gear.

Due to safety violations, the Joseph Gerczak crew terminated the voyage of one fishing vessel and escorted the vessel to port in Pago Pago, American Samoa.

"Coast Guard law enforcement boardings and vessel safety inspections are vital to ensuring safety of those at sea and protecting our precious marine ecosystems," said Lt. Caitlin Piker, commanding officer, Cutter Joseph Gerczak. "Our patrols

also enhance maritime domain awareness and serve as a critical line of defense against illegal activities that threaten our nation's security."

In accordance with the President's Executive Orders and direction from Adm. Kevin Lunday, the acting commandant of the Coast Guard, the Coast Guard is increasing cutter patrols and operations in American Samoa. The Coast Guard is surging assets to increase presence in key areas to protect America's maritime borders, territorial integrity, and sovereignty.

The Joseph Gerczak is a 154-foot Sentinel-class fast response cutter homeported in Honolulu. The cutter's primary missions are maritime law enforcement, search and rescue, and national defense.