

Coast Guard Cutter Valiant Returns Home After 9-Week Caribbean Patrol



A family member holds up a welcome home sign as she awaits the arrival of the Coast Guard Cutter Valiant crew on Feb. 27 to their homeport at Naval Station Mayport, Florida. U.S. Coast Guard/Petty Officer 2nd Class Ryan Dickinson

JACKSONVILLE, Fla. – The crew of the Coast Guard Cutter Valiant returned home on Feb. 27 to Naval Station Mayport after completing a nine-week patrol in the Caribbean Sea, according to the Coast Guard 7th District.

The Valiant crew patrolled more than 11,000 nautical miles in the Caribbean supporting Joint Interagency Task Force South (JIATF-S) conducting humanitarian and law-enforcement operations, ultimately saving 23 lives.

While underway, the Valiant crew interdicted a 30-foot disabled and adrift migrant vessel attempting an illegal voyage to Puerto Rico, about 37 nautical miles south of Isla Saona, Dominican Republic.

A Coast Guard HC-144 Ocean Sentry Maritime Patrol Aircraft crew spotted the vessel and directed Valiant to its location. This interdiction rescued 19 migrants whose vessel would not have had enough fuel to reach its U.S. destination. The crew later transferred the Dominican migrants to a Dominican navy vessel for a safe return home.

Previously, the Cutter Richard Dixon crew transferred 50 migrants to Valiant from two separate

interdictions. The Valiant crew transported six of the migrants to Ramey Sector Border Patrol Agents in Mayaguez, Puerto Rico, for federal prosecution on charges of attempting to illegally re-enter the United States. The crew then repatriated the remaining 44 migrants to the Dominican Republic.

In addition to interdicting migrant vessels, the Valiant crew conducted joint law-enforcement operations with the Belize coast guard and hosted a Belize coast guard officer aboard.

This opportunity gave both nations the chance to communicate and learn from each other while sharing different law-enforcement techniques. As a result of the exercise, Belize was able to establish a presence further offshore in a suspected drug smuggling area. Throughout their patrol, the crew conducted law-enforcement operations with an embarked MH-65 Dolphin helicopter crew from the U.S. Coast Guard's Helicopter Interdiction Tactical Squadron (HITRON) from Jacksonville, Florida.

Near the end of the patrol, the Valiant crew located two disabled vessels in a known drug smuggling area within a 24-hour period. The first was experiencing engine troubles and the other was out of fuel, and both crews claimed they had been adrift and without food or water for days. The Valiant crew rescued all four from their stricken vessels, embarked them onboard the cutter as search-and-rescue survivors, and transferred them to the Colombian navy for transport back to land.

"I couldn't be prouder of our crew this patrol as we plied the waters of the Caribbean for illicit maritime drug smugglers over the past two months in support of JIATF-S counterdrug operations, interdicting two logistics supply vessels," said Cmdr. Matthew Waldron, Valiant's commanding officer.

“Additionally, the crew demonstrated exceptional flexibility by quickly shifting gears from counter-drug to migrant operations and interdicting a disabled yola with 19 Dominican migrants bound for Puerto Rico in the middle of the night. Had it not been for the combined efforts of a forward-deployed Coast Guard Air Station Miami HC-144 crew, the Dominican Republic navy and Valiant, the individuals on that yola would have likely been lost at sea. ... That’s 19 lives saved.”