

Coast Guard Cutter Vigilant Returns after Caribbean Counter-Drug Patrol



The crew of Coast Guard Cutter Vigilant (WMEC 617) conducting a helicopter in-flight refueling evolution with a MH-65 assigned to Helicopter Interdiction Tactical Squadron during flight operations off the coast of St. Augustine, Florida, Sep. 26. U.S. Coast Guard.

CAPE CANAVERAL, Fla. – The Coast Guard Cutter Vigilant returned to Cape Canaveral Wednesday after completing a counter-drug patrol in the Caribbean, the Coast Guard 7th District said in a Nov. 4 release.

The crew of Vigilant spent 48 days patrolling the Caribbean, promoting maritime safety and security in support of Operation Southeast Watch and Operation Unified Resolve. The crew's efforts focused on ensuring the safety of life at sea while also enforcing border security by conducting counter-drug and alien migrant interdiction operations.

Patrolling the Windward Passage, the waterway located between Cuba and Haiti, as well as the northern coast of Haiti, Vigilant led the execution of Operation Southeast Watch for 13 days. Providing continuous overt presence along the Haitian coast, Vigilant discouraged illegal migrants from attempting the dangerous sea-going voyage in overloaded and unsafe vessels that put their lives at risk.

While deployed, the crew also worked alongside Coast Guard units and federal law enforcement agencies to disrupt illicit drug and migrant ventures in the Mona Passage as part of Operation Unified Resolve.

Operating in the waterway located between Puerto Rico and the

Dominican Republic, the crew supported the ongoing multiagency efforts of the Caribbean Border Interagency Group by interdicting, caring for, and repatriating suspected drug smugglers and illegal migrants. The collaborative efforts of the crew with the partner units and agencies enabled the interdiction, repatriation, and disposition of 166 migrants, who were endangered by the unsafe conditions of traveling aboard grossly overloaded and unseaworthy makeshift boats.

“I am extremely proud of how well our crew continues to respond to mission needs during these challenging times,” said Cmdr. Fred Bertsch, Vigilant’s commanding officer. “The Coast Guard’s primary responsibilities of protecting mariners on the seas and securing our homeland are vital and continue despite the impacts of the pandemic. Our crew worked together to overcome the hazards presented by the coronavirus so that they could continue to carry out and meet those responsibilities and duties. They are truly remarkable in the sacrifices they make and their devotion to duty.”

The cutter Vigilant is a 210-foot medium-endurance cutter homeported in Cape Canaveral. The cutter crew’s primary missions include search and rescue, illegal drug interdictions, alien migrant interdictions ensuring the safety of life at sea and enforcing international and domestic maritime laws.