

Coast Guard Decommissions Cutter Mellon After 52 Years of Service



Several department officers from the cutter Mellon stand together after a decommissioning ceremony for the cutter in Seattle on Aug. 20. The cutter was in service for 52 years. U.S. COAST GUARD / Petty Officer 3rd Class Michael Clark
SEATTLE – The U.S. Coast Guard decommissioned the cutter Mellon during an Aug. 21 ceremony at Coast Guard Base Seattle that was presided over by Rear Adm. Peter Gautier, the deputy commander of the Coast Guard Pacific Area.

Mellon was one of the Coast Guard's two remaining 378-foot Hamilton-class high-endurance cutters. The fleet of high-endurance cutters is being replaced by 418-foot Legend-class national security cutters, which serve as the Coast Guard's primary long-range asset.

Commissioned in 1968, the Mellon was the third of 12 high-endurance cutters built for long-range missions, including maritime security roles, drug interdiction, illegal immigrant interception and fisheries patrols.

"While Mellon's service to the U.S. Coast Guard now ends, the ship will continue its legacy of good maritime governance after transfer to the Kingdom of Bahrain's Royal Naval Force," Gautier said. "I am incredibly confident in the Coast Guard's future, because in ... Mellon's crew and proud history, I see the attributes that have made our Coast Guard 'Always Ready' for more than two centuries."



Rear Adm. Peter Gautier, Coast Guard Pacific Area deputy commander, salutes during a modified decommissioning ceremony

of the Mellon on Aug. 20 in Seattle. The Mellon will eventually be transferred to the Kingdom of Bahrain. U.S. COAST GUARD / Petty Officer 2nd Class Steve Strohmaier Mellon's keel was laid on July 25, 1966, at Avondale Shipyards in New Orleans. Mellon was launched Feb. 11, 1967, and commissioned on Jan. 9, 1968. The cutter was named after Andrew W. Mellon, the 49th U.S. Treasury secretary, who served from 1921 to 1932.

Over the past 52 years of service, Mellon's crews conducted a wide range of operations in all parts of the world. From 1969 through 1972, Mellon's crews participated in the Vietnam War, performing several naval gunfire support missions and patrolling Southeast Asian waters to prevent the smuggling of weapons into Vietnam. Mellon's participation in the Vietnam War earned the ship the Navy Meritorious Unit Commendation.

In the late-1970s and 1980s, the Mellon responded to numerous major search-and-rescue operations, including their assistance in the rescue of 510 passengers and crew members from the burning luxury liner Prinsendam in 1980.

In 1985, the Mellon entered the Fleet Renovation and Modernization program, a dry-dock program designed to prolong the high-endurance cutters' service lives. Mellon was recommissioned on March 3, 1989.

Living up to the Mellon's motto "Primus Inter Pares," meaning first among equals, the cutter established several Coast Guard firsts, including the first of five Hamilton-class cutters to have a Harpoon anti-ship missile system installed. Mellon was also the first – and only – Coast Guard cutter to test fire a Harpoon missile.

During Bering Sea patrols, Mellon conducted search-and-rescue operations and enforced laws and regulations that preserved vital Alaskan fisheries. In the eastern Pacific, the Mellon's boarding teams interdicted illegal narcotics trafficked over the high seas.

During the cutter's last year of service, 20 officers and 160 enlisted crew members patrolled the Bering Sea and the northern Pacific near Japan for more than a combined 230 days, collectively conducting 100 safety and fisheries boardings of U.S.-, Chinese-, Korean-, Japanese- and Russian-flagged fishing vessels and participating in five search-and-rescue cases.

"It has truly been an honor to serve as the final commanding officer for Coast Guard Cutter Mellon," said Capt. Jonathan Musman. "The officers, chiefs and crew for this final year have been truly remarkable and can hold their heads high as they operated Mellon with distinction across the North Pacific on three deployments serving our nation.

"The reliability of the cutter is a product of years and years of properly taking care of this beloved cutter. The legacy of Mellon has been those fantastic memories that have been made and the knowledge that has passed from one shipmate to another. The future generations of cuttermen were here this last deployment learning, teaching and making their shipboard memories, and they are ready to carry on and continue the Coast Guard's seagoing heritage."