

Cutter Vigilant Returns Home after 52-day Caribbean Counter-Drug Patrol



The Coast Guard Cutter Vigilant crew interdicts a 70-foot fishing vessel suspected of drug smuggling during a 52-day counter-drug patrol in the Eastern Pacific Ocean. The Vigilant is a 210-foot medium endurance cutter homeported in Cape Canaveral. *U.S. Coast Guard*

CAPE CANAVERAL, Fla. – The Coast Guard Cutter Vigilant and crew returned to Cape Canaveral March 5 following a 52-day counter-drug patrol in the Eastern Pacific Ocean, the Coast Guard 7th District said in a March 9 release.

During their patrol in the Pacific, Vigilant's crew worked with several U.S. and partner nation assets, including Panama's National Aeronaval Service (SENAN), Costa Rica's drug enforcement agency, a U.S. Navy warship, and three Coast Guard cutters. Vigilant's crew participated in a two-day multi-domain enhanced counternarcotic subject matter exchange with SENAN, demonstrating and practicing procedures for stopping drug smuggling vessels and medical evacuations. This promoted regional stability, economic prosperity, and security through collaborative engagement.

The Vigilant's crew interdicted a 70-foot fishing vessel suspected of drug smuggling. The cutter's crew discovered 1,900 pounds of cocaine hidden in the vessel's fuel tanks with an estimated wholesale value of \$26 million.

During the course of the patrol, over 45 suspected narco-traffickers crossed Vigilant's deck from 13 different interdictions executed by various Coast Guard cutters and Navy ships.

“Our crew did an exceptional job providing care and security for so many detainees, especially with the additional challenges created by COVID,” said Cmdr. Fred S. Bertsch, commanding officer of Vigilant.

The fight against drug cartels in the Eastern Pacific Ocean and the Caribbean Sea requires unity of effort in all phases from detection, monitoring and interdictions, to criminal prosecutions for these interdictions by United States Attorney’s Offices from the Middle District of Florida and the Southern District of Florida and the Southern District of California. The law enforcement phase of counter-smuggling operations in the Eastern Pacific Ocean is conducted under the authority of the 11th Coast Guard District, headquartered in Alameda. The interdictions, including the actual boardings, are led and conducted by members of the U.S. Coast Guard.

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