

USCGC Vigilant returns home after 55-day patrol in the Windward Passage



Credit: U.S. Coast Guard

From the U.S. Coast Guard Atlantic Area, 22 July 2024

CAPE CANAVERAL, Fla. – The crew of Coast Guard Cutter Vigilant (WMEC 617) returned home to Cape Canaveral, July 11, following a 55-day maritime safety and security patrol in the Windward Passage. Vigilant deployed in support of Homeland Security Task Force Southeast (HSTF-SE) and Operation Vigilant Sentry (OVS).

During the deployment, Vigilant's crew operated in the Seventh Coast Guard District area of operations and worked alongside other Coast Guard assets, international partners, the Department of Defense, U.S. Customs and Border Protection, and Puerto Rico Police's Joint Force of Rapid Action units to conduct counterdrug and migrant interdiction operations.

While on patrol, Vigilant's crew assisted Coast Guard Sector Key West with the interdiction of 117 Haitian migrants in the Florida Straits from an unlawful voyage bound for the United States. The migrants were endangered by the unsafe conditions aboard their grossly overloaded and unseaworthy vessel before being rescued by the Coast Guard.

Vigilant's crew also coordinated post-seizure operations after the Royal Netherlands Navy intercepted eight suspected drug smugglers and interdicted 503 pounds of cocaine worth an estimated value of \$6.8M. The joint-operations with the Royal Netherlands Navy served to strengthen ties with international partners and promote regional stability and security.

For over a week of patrol, Vigilant served as Cutter Tasking Unit for OVS while operating in the region. Crews executed maritime intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance operations while maintaining a continuous surface presence in the waters around Haiti. These operations were essential to deterring illegal migration ventures and illicit drug smuggling, contributing directly to the shared U.S. Coast Guard and U.S. national objective of combatting transnational criminal organizations.

“It was great to have another successful patrol aboard Vigilant, ensuring the safety and protection of mariners and conducting law enforcement operations,” said Cmdr. Jon Potterton, commanding officer of Vigilant. “Our crew did an exceptional job maintaining and operating our vessel as it approaches 60 years of service to our nation. We look forward to returning to our community, family, and friends after we successfully deterred illegal maritime migration, saved lives, and prevented drugs from entering the United States.”

Established in 2003, HSTF-SE is the Department of Homeland Security-led interagency task force charged with directing operational and tactical planning, command and control, and functions as a standing organization to deter, mitigate, and respond to maritime mass migration in the Caribbean Sea and Florida Straits.

OVS is the 2004 DHS plan that provides the structure for deploying joint air and surface assets and personnel to respond to irregular maritime migration in the Caribbean corridor of the United States. Its primary objectives are to protect life at sea while deterring and dissuading mass maritime migration alongside our federal, state, and local partners.

Vigilant is a 210-foot, Reliance-class medium endurance cutter. The cutter’s primary missions are counterdrug operations, migrant interdiction, enforcement of federal

fishery laws and search and rescue in support of U.S. Coast Guard operations.

Valiant is a Coast Guard asset assigned to U.S. Coast Guard Atlantic Area, which is based in Portsmouth, Virginia. Atlantic Area oversees all Coast Guard operations east of the Rocky Mountains to the Arabian Gulf. In addition to surge operations, Atlantic Area also allocates ships to deploy to the Caribbean and Eastern Pacific to combat transnational organized crime and illicit maritime activity.

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