

# THE RITA REPORT

EDITION 4: JANUARY-FEBRUARY 2015

Welcome aboard and Happy New Year! The crew of MARGARET NORVELL has had a busy two months, where a majority of that time was spent underway on the cutters patrol down in Puerto Rico. We would like to take this time to thank you, the families and friends, for your continued support of the cutter and her crew members. In this edition you will find the press release from the cutters recent drug bust, a look into the international operation that MARGARET NORVELL conducted with the French Navy, and as always crew pictures! Enjoy!



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## **THE CAPTAIN'S CORNER**

Friends, Family and Shipmates,

This is an exciting edition of *The Rita Report*. The last two months have been marked by extraordinary accomplishments of MARGARET NORVELL and her crew. We completed every District Seven mission during this time while underway for both Sector Miami and Sector San Juan. The diversity of missions ranged from a commercial fishing vessel termination to a \$24 million drug bust.

In early January, we undertook a five-week deployment to the U.S. territory of Puerto Rico to operate there and in the Greater Antilles. Due to a last minute schedule change, we worked for Sector Miami before heading to San Juan. Rough winter conditions prevailed, but there was plenty of work. During one long night, we prevented a deadly mishap off Palm Beach by terminating the voyage of a 20-foot commercial fishing vessel transiting at unsafe speeds without navigation lights. Demonstrating superior adaptability, we quickly transitioned from the safety case to an urgent search-and-rescue case involving a sinking vessel only miles away—saving four lives.

Further south, we encountered a couple interesting cases in the Old Bahama Channel. One case involved a sailboat attempting to enter Cuba, which, despite recent political changes, is still a violation of federal law. In another case, as the only asset in the Windward Pass, we overcame 8-foot building seas and 25-knot winds to rescue 59 persons from a floundering sailboat.

Once we arrived in Puerto Rico, we were very busy. Most notably, we interdicted two vessels with

\$24 million in contraband and two narcotics smugglers off the coast of Dominican Republic. We seized 18 bales and disrupted another 14 bales of cocaine totaling approximately 926 kilograms (over 2,000 pounds). We worked closely with the Dominican Republic Navy to ensure the seizure was turned over to the proper authorities for prosecution. Our involvement in this case resulted in the first narcotics bust by a Fast Response Cutter (FRC) in Operation UNIFIED RESOLVE.

Heading even further south, we facilitated western hemisphere partnerships during Operation ANTILLES SENTINEL, the first joint French-American counter narcotics patrol in the Greater Antilles under a combined command in ten years. We executed a highly successful professional exchange with the French naval vessel VENTOSE showcasing boarding team and small boat best practices.

But, as always, the real gems of the patrol were the memories made. During port calls in and around Puerto Rico, Juan Carlos Bauza and Katherine Poland were standing on the pier to welcome their son, crew member FN Bauza-Poland, home. FN Bauza-Poland hails from Aguadilla, Puerto Rico, and there is nothing more heartwarming than to see a son reunite with his mother. During our visit to Martinique, the French Navy hosted us at Fort St. Louis Naval Base, built in 1638, which served as a picturesque setting for our modern cutter. The crew made numerous friends with our French naval shipmates and spent a few days soaking up this enclave of French culture. Finally, in perhaps the most stunning reenlistment ceremony I have ever seen, BMC Mullen and BM2 Mero renewed their commitment to the Coast Guard atop the ramparts of the 17<sup>th</sup>

century stronghold with an enormous French tricolor flying in the background.

Missions and memories were also marked by professional accomplishments. We had a number of crewmembers earn law enforcement qualifications: BM1 Garcia and BM2 Test became boarding officers, and FS3 Stewart became a boarding team member. FN Bauza-Poland earned his Engineer of the Watch qualification. Auxiliarist Rosenberg, who has become an established member of our crew, earned his Quartermaster of the Watch Qualification, completing the requirement for his Auxiliary Cuttermen's Pin and making him one of a handful of Auxiliarists ever to earn this prestigious qualification.

To close out February, MARGARET NORVELL and her crew were honored to be visited by Master Chief Petty Officer of the Coast Guard Steven Cantrell and Reserve Master Chief Petty Officer of the Coast Guard Eric L. Johnson, as well as their wives. It was a great opportunity for the crew to speak with the Coast Guard's senior enlisted member over lunch and a unique chance for Master Chief Cantrell to see the challenges faced by an FRC. Our Ombudsman, Yamil Cordero, was also able to meet with Janet Cantrell, the Coast Guard's Ombudsman at large, to discuss issues facing the families of our crewmembers.

Without a doubt, these past two months have been formative for our crewmembers, and the cutter's operational success is a testament to their professionalism and dedication to duty. I am extremely proud of their accomplishments and am honored to serve alongside them.

## Coast Guard interdicts multi-million dollar cocaine shipment, detains 2 smugglers off the southern coast of the Dominican Republic

Dominican Republic Navy recovers 32 bales of cocaine jettisoned from second drug smuggling vessel

SAN JUAN, Puerto Rico — The crew of the Coast Guard Cutter Margaret Norvell transferred custody of two smugglers and 18 bales of cocaine, to Dominican Republic Naval authorities Sunday, following an at-sea interdiction in waters south of the Dominican Republic Saturday.

The Norvell pursued the suspect go-fast vessel as it traveled northbound approximately 20 nautical miles south of the Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic.

Dominican Republic Navy authorities also recovered 32 additional bales of cocaine, which had been jettisoned from a second drug smuggling vessel Saturday.

The illegal drug shipment consisted of 50 bales of cocaine, weighing approximately 2,064 pounds, with an estimated street value of approximately \$24 million dollars.

The interdiction was a result of U.S. Coast Guard, U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement's (ICE) Homeland Security Investigations (HSI), Joint Interagency Task Force-South and Dominican Republic Navy coordinated efforts in support of Operation Unified Resolve and Operation Caribbean Guard.

"The strong partnerships and efficient interagency coordination between regional law enforcement and Dominican Republic authorities resulted in the successful interdiction of this major drug shipment and the apprehension of two smugglers," said Capt. Robert Warren, Coast Guard Sector San Juan commander. "We stand committed to securing the nation's Caribbean maritime border and will continue to aggressively employ all available resources to interdict illegal drug trafficking

activities at-sea and bring those responsible to justice."

During a routine law enforcement patrol in the Caribbean Sea Saturday morning, the crew of a Coast Guard HC-144 maritime patrol aircraft from Air Station Miami detected two men aboard a suspicious go-fast vessel carrying a load of suspected contraband.

Coast Guard Watchstanders from Sector San Juan proceeded to divert the Margaret Norvell and coordinate with Dominican Republic Navy authorities to interdict the suspect vessel. Once on scene, the Margaret Norvell deployed their Over the Horizon cutter boat and interdicted the suspect vessel in Dominican Republic territorial waters. The crew of the Margaret Norvell proceeded to embark the 18 bales of suspected contraband as well as the two detained smugglers. A field test revealed the suspected contraband to be cocaine.

The Margaret Norvell rendezvoused with Dominican Republic Navy authorities Sunday afternoon, to whom they transferred custody the seized cocaine shipment and two smugglers. The detained smugglers are to be charged and prosecuted by Dominican Republic authorities.

*The Coast Guard's efforts under Operation Unified Resolve contribute to the interagency results being achieved each and every day locally under Operation Caribbean Guard, which coordinates efforts between the Coast Guard, its DHS, Commonwealth and Territorial law enforcement partners, who are working diligently to deter, detect and disrupt illicit maritime trafficking to Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands.*

*The Margaret Norvell is a 154-foot Sentinel Class Fast Response Cutter homeported in Miami Florida.*



LT Fistick with the Dominican Republic Navy representative.



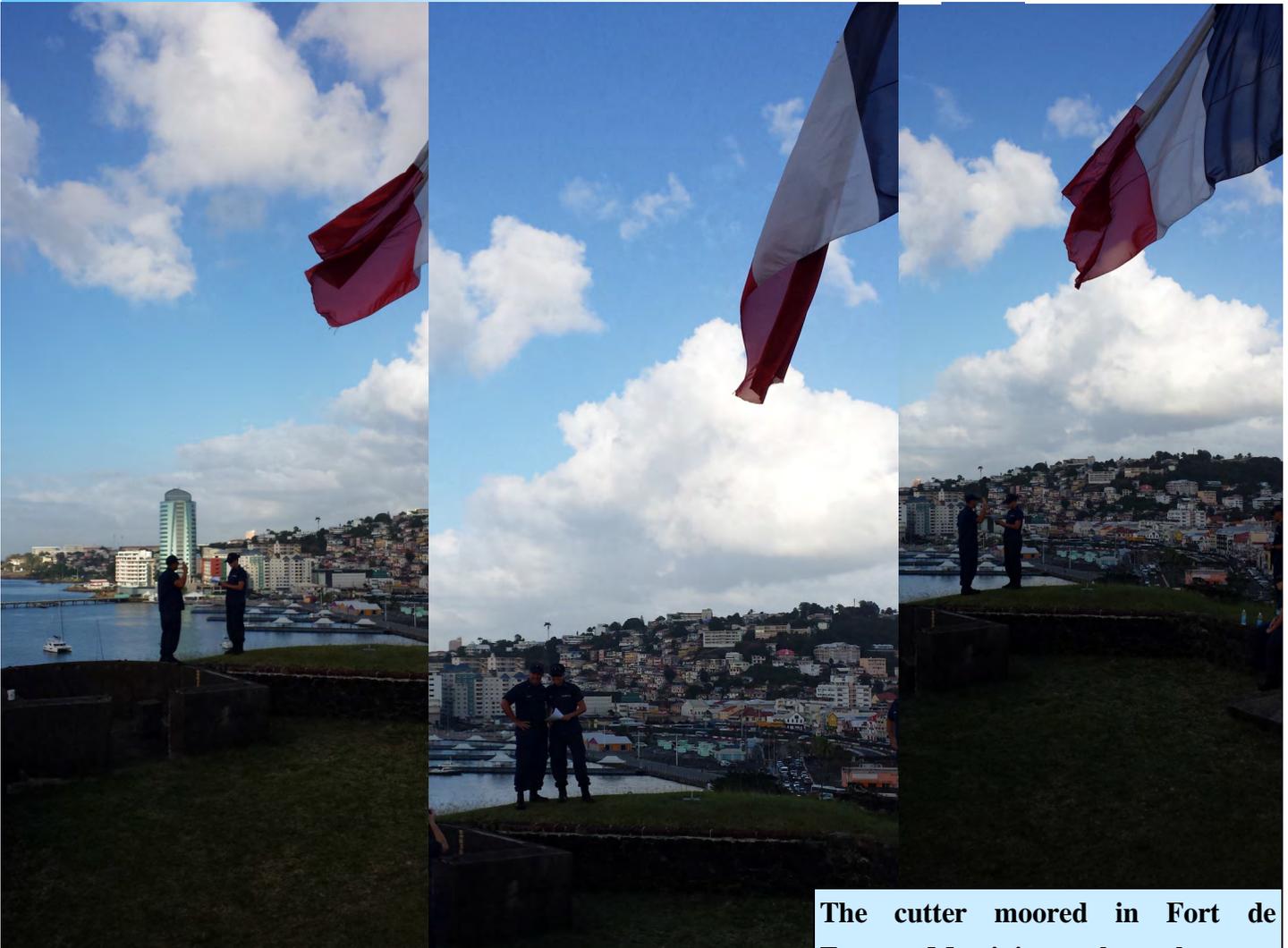
BM2 Mero conducted the transfer of the contraband and vessel to the Dominican Republic Navy.





Upon arrival to Fort de France, MARGARET NORVELL and her command were greeted by the French officials. Pictured above LT Fistick gives the French Chief of Staff a paddle as a token of appreciation and friendship. The paddle contained the coins of all units that were involved with the French Operation, including USCGC SAPELO, USCGC MARGARET NORVELL, and Sector San Juan. Once at sea, MARGARET NORVELL sent three crewmembers to the French Naval Ship VENTOSE where they received a tour of the ship and interacted with the French crew. BM1 Ives, MKC Lavallee, and LTJG Neuhardt pose for a picture with two French crewmembers while on VENTOSE.





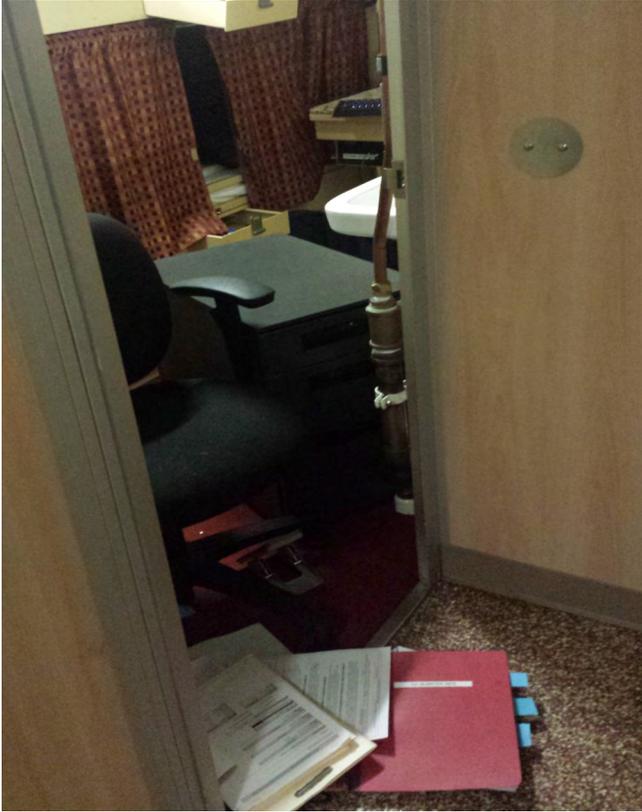
**The cutter moored in Fort de France, Martinique where the crew was able to interact with the French Navy, as well as enjoy the beautiful island!**

**Pictured above, BMC Karel Mullen and BM2 Jon Mero re-enlisted in the Coast Guard at Fort de France.**



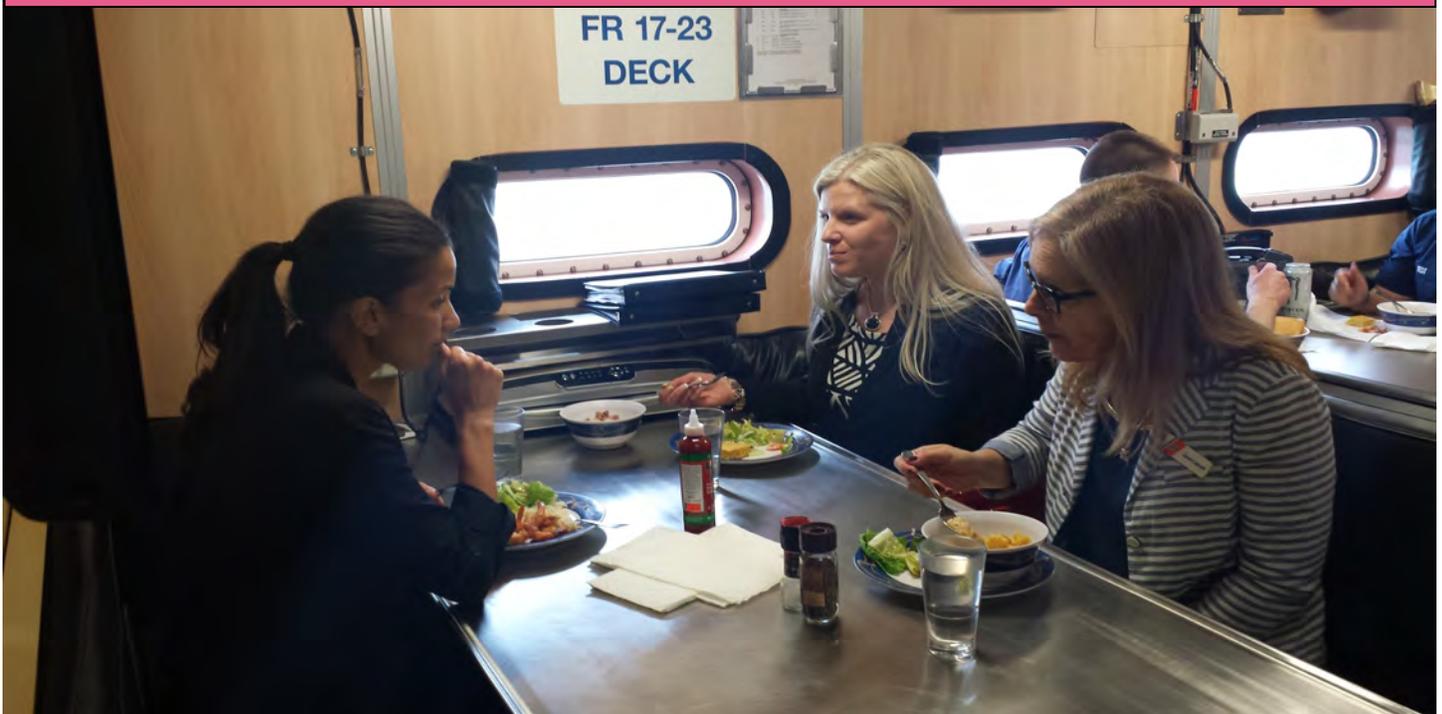


# SECURE FOR SEA XO





Master Chief Petty Officer of the Coast Guard Steven Cantrell and Reserve Master Chief Petty Officer of the Coast Guard Eric Johnson along with their wives, came onboard MARGARET NORVELL where they spoke with crew and stayed for lunch. This visit allowed for them to hear from the junior enlisted members of the crew and hear about the Fast Response Cutters. Our Ombudsman, Yamil Cordero, ate lunch with Janet Cantrell, pictured below, where they had the chance to discuss issues that Coast Guard families face every day.





Friends, Family, and Shipmates,

Thank you for reading the Rita Report we hope you it gave you a little insight as to what your loved one is accomplishing on a daily basis. Would like to take this time to thank all the crew members for their contributions to the newsletter and for their hard work while onboard. Now that you have enjoyed the newsletter, if you would like to provide feedback or comments please feel free to contact me at [Jillian.E.Kelly@uscg.mil](mailto:Jillian.E.Kelly@uscg.mil). Thank you all for your support, enjoy!

Very respectfully, ENS Jillian Kelly