



The  
Shade  
Tree

**WILKS' WORLD**  
**Productions**

## On The Cover:

The cover shot was taken while launching OAK 1 prior to the YN2 Re-enlistment swim call. The bird in the left of the picture is one of two juvenile peregrine falcons that took up residence on OAK while we steamed south from Virginia.

*“Sign here son, Uncle Sam  
is counting on you”*

Swim calls are always a welcomed event for cutter crews underway in southern waters, especially during the hottest summer months. During the October trip South, the time came for one of our Independent Duty guys to re-enlist. YN2 Timothy Broome was at the end of his enlistment period and so had to redo his oath to the Coast Guard and the US government which we



support. OAK’s captain, LCDR Niles, wouldn’t let our feisty yeoman get away with a standard re-enlistment however. He had to first dive off of OAK’s buoy deck during



our swim call off the coast of Florida and then repeat his sworn oath while treading water in the 1000 feet deep, royal blue water of the Atlantic. The swim call was enjoyed by many and even included a short sprint race between two of our JO’s and a soon to be airman.

# OAK , Black Hull or White Hull?

Subj: Operation Treasure Chest

Location: Gulf of Mexico, off of Honduras

Mission: Narcotics Recovery

During OAK's patrol south trip in July of 2011, we had the very unique opportunity of taking part in what was appropriately called, Operation Treasure Chest.

A drug running Self Propelled Semi-Submersible, SPSS, was interdicted by USCGC SENECA off the coast of Honduras and in attempt to

destroy evidence, the drug runners scuttled the SPSS in 60 ft of water. OAK was identified as a capable district cutter which could locate the sunken SPSS and support a team of 15 FBI divers to recover the narcotics. After arriving on scene, OAK located the SPSS through the use of an experimental side scan sonar deployed manually from the weather deck of the cutter. The sonar produced an impressive 3-D representation of the SPSS which had come to rest with the stern buried in the muddy sea floor and the bow only 35 ft beneath the surface of the water. The very next day diving operations began to recover the unknown amount of narcotics. After five days of diving, a total of 232 bales of cocaine, weighing 7.5 tons, were brought up and secured on OAK's buoy deck. Subject matter experts estimated the street value of the cocaine to be at \$180 million. The drug bust represented several firsts; it was the first SPSS interdicted on the east coast of the Americas, and the first time divers were used to recover narcotics off of a scuttled drug running vessel.



# Rescue at Sea

It was the very beginning of the 8-12 morning watch, the day after we had left Charleston headed south, when OAK received a weak MAYDAY in the middle of the Gulf Stream off the coast of Florida. Two Bahamian men, stranded in a 32' motor boat, had by chance drifted near enough OAK that their weak VHF transmission had picked up on our



side. The two men had been afloat for four days and were almost out of water. They had hard wired the VHF radio straight to the battery and had an antenna cable draped through the cockpit area of the boat. It was a touch of fate that OAK came within the five mile reach of the weak VHF transmission and so was able to rescue the two men before their battery died altogether, leaving them at the mercy of the Gulf Stream current. Neither of the men were in seriously peril, though the older gentleman had an injured shoulder which prevented him from using it when flagging for help from



passing ships. Both men and the vessel were transferred to a Station Port Canaveral 45' RB-M response boat to receive further care and processing. The Station Port Canaveral crew was extremely professional and displayed an impressive level of capability while transferring the Bahamian men and then taking the small boat in tow from the OAK while making way.

# On the Tail of a Hurricane:

## OAK's Hurricane Irene Relief Story

As a Coast Guardsman operating in the District 7 area of responsibility, AOR, the inherent risks and possible diversions associated with hurricane season are well understood. We are all at the mercy of the weather and must act accordingly to avoid and sometimes respond when a hurricane passes through. The week of 21 August 2011 Hurricane Irene, a category 3 hurricane at its peak, made landfall in the Mid-Atlantic region of the United States, causing millions of dollars in property damage and taking the life of 47 Americans. OAK was diverted to Savannah, GA to avoid the hurricane as it passed the



Southeast US . The day after its passing, OAK pulled out from Savannah, heading north on the tails of the hurricane. The old saying of the strangeness of the calm before the storm pales in comparison with the calm which follows after all the power of nature has been unleashed and ahead of you only looms destruction and despair. USCGC ELM had diverted offshore in the Atlantic to avoid the storm and so was not able to be on scene as soon as OAK, so we followed the hurricane all the way up the coast verifying and repositioning aids in North Carolina and the Chesapeake Bay entrance. Naval and commercial vessel traffic is critical to the support of most coastal cities. It was our duty to verify all major aids and reopen the waterways after ensuring they were safe for vessel traffic. Re-opening the Chesapeake Bay was especially important since major cities including Norfolk, VA, Baltimore, MD, and Washington D.C. are all serviced by vessel



traffic of the Chesapeake. Also on scene in the Chesapeake, USCGC FRANK DREW, of Portsmouth, VA, worked days on end to verify and reposition the aids which it is the primary servicing unit. Thanks to the crews of OAK, FRANK DREW, and ELM, North Carolina and the Chesapeake Bay ports were reopened within a week of the hurricane ensuring the safety of critical naval and commercial vessels.

## *International Engagement*

As part of the Coast Guards continued efforts to aid Haiti, OAK makes stops while on south patrols to help repair the Haitian Guard de Cote's , the national coast guard, facilities and vessels. During OAK's visit in July 2011, we spent two days helping with repairs that the Haitian Guard de Cote unfortunately cannot afford to make themselves. Members of the engineering department helped build new shelves for the medical facility. Westernized medical care is largely unavailable for many Haitians and this small clinic on the Guard de Cote base represents the only source for first aid that the Haitian servicemen stationed there have. The engineers on OAK

also assisted with assessing and effecting what repairs we were able to on the vessels used by the Guard de Cote. Due to the lack of available replacement parts and tools necessary for the Haitians to effectively repair their crafts themselves, many of their vessels become useless until they are able to receive outside support, which limits their ability to maintain a commercially safe port.

What has become an expected and anticipated event before we leave each trip, we engage the Haitians in a friendly game of volleyball. I say friendly, because it is known amongst our crew how competitive and capable the Haitians are. Despite who wins or loses, a good time is had by all and even just to watch is enjoyable and exciting. We held our own pretty well in this match with our XO making some impressive plays.



# Birds of the October trip South: So far from land, it just doesn't add up

During OAK's October patrol south, we had several seemingly out of place visitors. A small aviary's worth of interesting land birds for some reason were hundreds of miles from land and saw OAK as a sort of "rest stop" on their migration south.



Exhibit A: Peregrine Falcon (juvenile)

There are multiple subspecies of this falcon, but this fellow was most likely of a mixed race that migrates between the Southeast United States and the upper parts of South America.



Exhibit B: Common Barn Owl

The common barn owl is found in a vast array of countries throughout the world. This handsome guy or girl was likely from Cuba.



Exhibit C: Great Egret

Great Egrets can grow to a meter in height and are actually a subspecies of heron which can be easily recognized when comparing body and bill shape.



Exhibit D: American Kestrel

The smallest falcon found in North America, these little birds of prey, also known as the Sparrow Hawk, travel to Central America during cold winter months.