

# 7th District



COAST GUARD PHOTO BY R. SELL

The Seventh District is a 1.8 million square mile hotbed of activity that encompasses the southeastern United States and the Caribbean basin. Illegal migration, drug smuggling, year-round recreational boating and diving, and commercial fishing are mainstays that keep units abuzz rescuing mariners in distress and enforcing maritime laws.

The sheer number of assets in the district gives an indication of the intensity of operations. Thirty-three patrol boats—one-third of the Coast Guard's entire fleet—are assigned to the Seventh. One-quarter of all Coast Guard aircraft are based in the district. In all, 45 cutters, 155 boats, 31 helicopters and 18 planes operate out of bases or ports in the Seventh. The district's 5,300 auxiliaries provide another 880 boats and 30 aircraft to draw upon. Nearly 4,200 active duty and reserve members along with 150 civilians serve in the Seventh.

Much of this might operates out of points in southern Florida and the Caribbean, close to the smuggling routes. In fiscal year 2000, Coast Guard crews halted 2,600 Cuban, Haitian and Dominican Republic migrants in Seventh District waters. Crews stopped roughly 30,000 pounds of cocaine. Migrants and drugs alike often move, and are inter-

dicted, in small amounts in the Caribbean: a dozen or fewer migrants on a home-made vessel; a ton or so of marijuana or cocaine on a smugglers' go-fast boat. Go-fasts, which are hard to spot and can usually outrun most traditional Coast Guard cutters, pose the district's biggest challenge in terms of both drug and migrant smuggling.

Successes in counter-narcotics efforts, however, should be on the upswing soon, with the recent introduction of armed helicopters, over-the-horizon rigid-hull inflatable boats and deployable pursuit boats all capable of keeping up with and stopping smugglers' go-fasts.

But the Seventh is not just about drugs and migrants. Throughout the district, but primarily north and in the Gulf of Mexico, crews work with the 12,000 commercial fishing vessels and more than one million recreational boats to enforce fisheries laws and protect the

endangered manatee.

The district handles about 10,000 search and rescue cases a year—about 20 percent of the entire Coast Guard rescue load. The district coordinates with 31 Caribbean, Central and South American nations and territories in both its law enforcement and search and rescue efforts.

The district's five marine safety offices and three marine safety detachments maintain a heavy vessel inspection schedule, as the three busiest cruise ship ports in North America and seven of the country's 20 largest container ports fall within district boundaries. In addition, the Seventh District is home to three strategic ports. The ports of Charleston, S.C., Savannah, Ga., and Jacksonville, Fla., are vital to the United States' warfighting ability. The Seventh District also operates the Greater Antilles Section, a major command in Puerto Rico.

As in every district, aids to navigation is a vital but low-key mission in the Seventh, where some 6,500 buoys, lights and daybeacons are maintained and some 150 bridges are regulated.



Miami