

Hello,

My name is Geoff Gagnier and I am the commanding officer of SPENCER. You can be very proud of the hard work, leadership, specialty knowledge, and professionalism of your family members and friends on SPENCER. They are doing important work that is critical to the safety and security of the nation. It is an honor for me to serve alongside them.

Operationally, it's been an interesting patrol. We conducted law enforcement boardings of three fishing vessels in New England around Thanksgiving. In our current operational area, we chased one go-fast vessel in the middle of the night. It was very exciting as we deployed a small boat with our non-compliant vessel team and landed/refueled a helicopter that was minutes from running out of gas after dark. The helicopter was armed and tracking the go-fast vessel with us. Although we were unsuccessful that night, our crew's performance was exceptional, especially after spending all afternoon transferring to another Coast Guard vessel 3000+ pounds of cocaine and 20 detainees that had been previously interdicted by a another Coast Guard law enforcement team.

While we were in Colombia, we spent two full days working alongside our Colombian Navy and Coast Guard counterparts exchanging tactics and information while building relationships. I think the highlight of the two-day event was the simulated go-fast vessel interdiction exercise. The Colombians used an actual go-fast vessel that they had seized previously, as the exercise drug smuggling boat. We used our over-the-horizon (OTH) small boat to start the exercise and then turned the chase over to the Colombians for stopping and boarding the boat. We put some of our crew members on their boats and they did the same with our OTH. A couple of our folks actually got to drive the go-fast vessel, which was a real thrill, and unique experience, for them. (The go-fast vessel goes 60 miles per hour!) Despite the hard work and loss of time off during the port call, our crew really enjoyed their interactions with the Colombians. The Colombians were extremely cordial and fun-loving hosts.

One of the unique aspects of our deployment has been the presence of Scott Frahlich, an Endicott College professor. He's in the front row of the attached photo. By the time we return to Boston, he will have taught eight college classes for a third or more of the crew. It's been fun to see people studying after watch for their Criminal Justice class, reviewing their College Writing papers on the mess deck, and exhaling upon leaving the wardroom after finishing their Math Problem Solving final exam. The Coast Guard is full of great opportunities. Earning college credits while underway is certainly one of them.

Thank you for all the cards, presents, emails, photos, internet blog entries, and 13 pages of well wishes compiled by Betsy Jones, our Ombudsman. Our executive officer, Reino Ecklord, has been diligently putting your photos in our plan of the day and posting them on our internal web site. We are enjoying them a great deal. It is tough to be away from home over the holidays but your overwhelming support makes the burden easier to bear. Our morale committee kicked it into high gear this week with a door-decorating contest, ginger bread house contest, "white elephant" gift swap, and a reading of The OOD's Night Before Christmas. With Christmas music playing on the mess deck, FS1 Jessica Nicholson and her team of chefs have been working hard baking cookies and preparing a Christmas feast. LTjg Jeremy Somplasky served as Santa Claus tonight and delivered your gifts to the crew with his elves BM1 Chelsea Lee and LTjg Luke Walsh. Toward the end the evening, MK1 Mark Burgoa played Silent Night on the bagpipes over the shipboard announcement system.

Thank you again for the support you provide to your loved ones on SPENCER. It really means a lot to us.

I look forward to seeing some of you when we return. Happy Holidays to all of you and best wishes to you and your families.

Very respectfully,

CDR Geoff Gagnier
Commanding Officer
USCGC SPENCER (WMEC 905)