

WINGS OF GOLD



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The Voice of Naval Aviation
Yesterday, Today
and
Tomorrow
Summer 2013

U. S. Coast Guard Update

By VADM John Currier Vice Commandant USCG

The U.S. Coast Guard protects those on the sea, protects the nation from threats delivered by sea and protects the sea itself. We are responsible for the safety, security and stewardship of our Nation's waters, including the 4.5 million square mile maritime Exclusive Economic Zone, the largest in the world. Our concept of operations includes the integration of aviation and surface assets into a very capable multi-mission force.

Our broad authorities and responsibilities require a persistent presence in this expanse, and aviation assets, often working in conjunction with cutters and boats, are critical to maritime domain awareness and national sovereignty. Some recent aviation highlights of note:

- Our Helicopter Interdiction Squadron MH-65 crews and aircraft have performed brilliantly as an integral cog in the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) layered security strategy. Operating from offshore cutters often at night in demanding, low-over-water situations, they directly contributed to the interdiction of 20 metric tons of cocaine last year, twice the amount from the previous year.

- Coast Guard Air Station Atlantic City, New Jersey; MH-65 crews and aircraft continued to conduct its tactically-complex Rotary Wing Air Intercept mission under the tactical direction of the North American Aerospace Defense Command (NORAD). This mission provides National Capitol Region airborne security through rapid response for low/slow aviation incursions into restricted and surrounding airspace.

- As Hurricane Sandy raged, aircrews from Air Station Elizabeth City, North Carolina MH-60s and HC-130Js responded to the foundering HMS *Bounty*, rescuing 14 crewmembers from the 30-foot seas and 60-knot winds. I met with those air crews after the rescue, and even the most experienced told me that the turbulent transit and on-scene conditions were the worst they had ever flown in.

- The crew of a HC-130H on patrol detected a vessel possibly engaged in illicit activity off Santa Cruz Island, California, then notified local surface assets. When the suspected smugglers rammed a responding Coast Guard small boat resulting in the death of a Coast Guardsman, the C-130H crew and then a MH-60 crew were able to continually surveil the vessel for more than three hours, resulting in the interdiction and apprehension of the suspects prior to entering Mexican waters. The suspects remain in U.S. custody.

- MH-60 and MH-65 crews from Air Station Kodiak, Alaska spent the past summer exploring the envelope for operations and logistics off the North Slope of Alaska as part of Operation Arctic Shield.

To ensure that our aviators and aircrew have the best tools available to safely conduct our varied missions such as these, we are coordinating a variety of sustainment and recapitalization programs of both our fixed and rotary-wing fleets.

Thanks to the advocacy of DHS, Congress and the Administration, we have taken delivery of 15 HC-144 Ocean Guardian Medium Range Surveillance (MRS) aircraft to date and have funds to procure the 18th HC-144 in the FY 2013 budget. It is a great addition to the aviation fleet, already achieving significant success, particularly in law enforcement and search and rescue. It is the replacement aircraft for our



VADM John Currier, USCG

A graduate of the University of Southern Maine, VADM Currier was commissioned in 1976 and earned his wings in 1977. He has had duty at many Coast Guard facilities including air stations Cape Cod, Massachusetts and Sitka, Alaska. He was designated an Aeronautical Engineer in 1982, complementing his Masters of Business Degree from Embry-Riddle University earlier. Subsequent duty stations included Traverse City, Michigan and Astoria, Oregon. He was also CO of Air Station Detroit, Michigan and CO of Air Station Miami, Florida (the world's busiest air-sea rescue unit). He was the Coast Guard's Pacific Area Chief of Operations. He was also Deputy Program Manager (Engineering) for the Coast Guard HH-60J and the Navy HH-60H helicopters in Naval Air Systems Command. He was Chief of Staff of the Coast Guard. He became Assistant Commandant for Acquisition at Coast Guard Headquarters before his current assignment as the Coast Guard's Vice Commandant. VADM Currier has more than 6,000 flight hours in his log book in both fixed and rotary-wing aircraft. Awards include the Coast Guard Distinguished Service Medal, the Legion of Merit and the Distinguished Flying Cross.

Photo of VADM Currier, above, is provided courtesy of the U.S. Coast Guard.

venerable HU-25 Falcon Jet fleet which is being retired from service after more than 30 years.

Another potential new airframe for the Coast Guard is the C27J. We are pursuing the potential transfer of U.S. Air Force C27J utility aircraft into our inventory. These extremely capable, low-time airframes offer multi-mode weather/search radar, night vision goggle compatibility and an advanced communications suite, among other desirable features. Capabilities-wise, the C27J fits between the HC-144 and the HC-130H, showing great promise for the upper-end MRS missions and some lower-end Long Range Surveillance (LRS) missions as well. Additionally, the inter-military transfer of these aircraft could avoid significant costs in current fleet recapitalization plans.

With strong support from Congress, the 40-year old HC-130H fleet is gradually being replaced with a fleet of HC-130J aircraft. The HC-130Js have more efficient engines and propellers providing a 20 percent increase in speed and altitude, and a 40 percent increase in range over its predecessor, resulting in savings in manning, training, and fuel costs. We just contracted



Helicopter Interdiction Tactical Squadron (HITRON) Jacksonville, demonstrates the warning shots fired by a MH-65C Dolphin, at a "non-compliant" boat, off the Florida coast. (Coast Guard Photo by PO3 Michael Hulme)

for our ninth HC-130J and have been awarded funding for the tenth. During this recapitalization effort we are also addressing sustainability issues with the older HC-130H models, outfitting them with life-extending center-wing boxes and updated avionics packages to ensure their continued service.

Our rotary wing fleets are realizing some improvements as well. We are nearly complete with our program to convert HH-60Js into MH-60T MRS helicopters. This conversion modernizes the flight avionics and upgrades the sensor suite, greatly enhancing flight crew situational awareness and expanding aircraft capability. We have also just begun production on the MH-65D prototype which upgrades and modernizes our MH-65C Short Range Recovery helicopters with the same avionics and sensors used in our MH-60T fleet conversion.

While our aviation community has made tremendous contributions in all areas, we must continue to focus on proficiency. On 28 February 2012, a Coast Guard MH-65C, CG 6535, went down in Mobile Bay, Alabama, during a training flight. All four members of the crew made the ultimate sacrifice. While the exact cause of this mishap is still under investigation,

our record of aviation mishaps over the past four and a half years has led us to focus on improving the operational safety culture Service-wide, and incorporating the findings of the Aviation Safety Action Program into the operations of both air and surface assets. Proficiency in craft, proficiency in leadership, and disciplined initiative – these are the enduring operational principals that define us as Coast Guardsmen.

We carry out our missions in a very challenging and, at times, unforgiving environment. Improvements to our fleet of aircraft are indeed vital to our continued success. However, this success is only made possible because of the great men and women who continue to step forward and serve, accepting the continuing challenge of managing risk to accomplish challenging missions safely and effectively. *Semper Paratus!*

Vice Admiral Currier is the 23rd Ancient Albatross of the Coast Guard, an honorary position held by the longest-serving Coast Guard Aviator on active duty.

