

# WINGS OF GOLD





# The United States Coast Guard's Air War At Sea

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**COAST GUARD'S NEW HC-130H-7 PATROL AIRCRAFT** — First of five new HC-130H-7 surveillance aircraft acquired by the U.S. Coast Guard is pictured patrolling coastline of Florida. Delivery of the first aircraft took place May 31 at USCG Station Clearwater, Fla. The Coast Guard operates a large fleet of HC-130's for its long range patrol work and now is launched on a major fleet modernization program.

**T**he ships and patrol boats of the U.S. Coast Guard have been dubbed the "SMOKIES OF THE SEA" as a result of the increased emphasis on the service's maritime law enforcement role since the mid 1970's. Coast Guard aviation, as the eyes of the fleet, is committed to keeping a "BEAR IN THE AIR" for intelligence collection and surveillance in support of the cutters. The last of

the HU-16 and HC-131 "piston pounders" have departed for the boneyard, replaced with the sleek new HU-25 Falcon jets which promise the advantages of high dash speed and a sophisticated electronic sensor package. The aging single-engine HH-52 helicopter will soon be replaced by the twin engine HH-65 Dolphin, the performance and versatility of which will greatly enhance helicopter opera-

tions conducted from the decks of our ships. An able but airweary force of twenty HC-130 Hercules aircraft are presently undergoing a modernization program to insure remote logistics and long range surveillance capabilities through the year 2000.

Coast Guard aviation has been at "war" for the past ten years. Successful campaigns have been waged against polluters, fish poachers, illegal aliens,



and drug smugglers. Strategic and tactical experience gained in the employment of air resources during numerous high visibility crises has proved to be invaluable for tailoring various "force packages" to particular situations. Acquisition of costly high technology systems such as Side Looking Airborne Radar, Forward Looking Infra-Red, Low Light Level Television, Night Vision equipment, and Gyro-Stabilized Binoculars, to name but a few, can be expected to dramatically increase aviation's effectiveness. The following article describes a decade of transformation in the thrust of Coast Guard aviation and provides a glimpse of the future.

### 1973 to 1976: "The Battle of the Northwest Atlantic"

This was the "gentlemen's war". Hundreds of greedy foreign factory trawlers laid siege to the lucrative fishing grounds along the 100 fathom curve from New Jersey to Nova Scotia. Treaties and bilateral agreements provided the rules of engagement. Boardings and inspections to determine a vessel's compliance were largely consensual, since the Coast Guard lacked jurisdiction over foreign vessels outside territorial or contiguous waters. National Marine Fisheries Service agents flew with Coast Guard HU-16 Albatross (affectionately known as the "goat") patrols originating almost daily from the Coast Guard Air Station on Cape Cod. The location and activity of the enemy was carefully surveyed. On frequent occasions, the aircraft diverted to document the outrage of an offshore lobsterman whose fixed pots had been rampaged by a careless trawler's huge net.

Coast Guard aviation crews learned a new vocabulary, replete with exotic legal terms such as "force majeure" and "hot pursuit". The latter doctrine enabled Coast Guard vessels and aircraft to chase a violator far beyond the scene of the crime as long as constant contact was maintained. The maintenance and hand-off involved in a hot pursuit required detailed navigational records and affidavits. Upon return from a mission, aircraft RADAR, LORAN, and VORTAC receivers were often removed and sent off for recalibration in order to verify the extent of equipment error present at the time of position fixing. Sharp admiralty lawyers were quick to challenge the veracity of any allegation against their client in federal court.

At about this same time, a new emphasis was applied to Coast Guard aviation with the creation of the "ship/helicopter team". Coast Guard helicopter crews had assumed reconnaissance duties for polar icebreakers from the Navy in 1968 with the creation of a fledgling unit called IBSEC (Icebreaker Support Section) home-based in Mobile, Alabama. As experience gained on the long term icebreaker deployments began to filter out to field helicopter units, staff officers perceived an opportunity to place an HH-52 helicopter aboard nearly every flight deck equipped cutter departing on an offshore fisheries patrol.

Summertime deployments in the George's Bank area off New England were simply great sport. You merely leaped aboard the host ship for a week or two of thrice-daily sorties in quest of the bad guys. Sunny August skies and placid seas afforded ample opportunity to explore the new concept. Many of the pilots, "retreads" from other armed forces who had entered the Coast Guard via the Direct Commission Aviator program, received their first taste of sea duty. Wardroom humor abounded with friendly jibes at the "brown shoes", and many a sailor relished a chance to win a little "flight pay" in penny-a-point gin rummy or nickle-dime poker. The 210 foot WMECs had no air search radar, so occasional encounters with haze or fog tested the solo pilot's ability to maintain an accurate DR plot. On more than one occasion, the ship's low frequency beacon or a radio check on VHF-FM "to test the aircraft homing apparatus" provided deliverance. Shipboard TACAN was a costly luxury the Coast Guard could ill afford. One pilot was forced to land and shut down on the fog-shrouded calm water so the ship could find him before his fuel was exhausted. Discretion, after all, is the better part of valor.

Winter approached, and the jovial good humor of the "black shoes" abruptly turned into an omnipresent mood of suspicion. On one ship, a huge hawser was stretched across the flight deck and lead to the towing winch astern. During periods of heavy weather, the damage control officer became disconsolate about the ship's stability. Presumably if the vessel was not quick enough to recover from a "bell ringing" roll, 8000 pounds of metacentric adversity would be catapulted to oblivion. Even the 378

foot WHECs lacked the cozy hangars to which aircrews had become accustomed in their shorebound days. Rigid blade tie-downs and velcro-type fabric "cocoons" were of marginal use in a nor'easter. One mistake during manual blade folding could result in irreparable damage to a costly airfoil. A meager support kit consisting of consumables and high failure rate items (excluding Type I materials) was the limit of spare parts support. Little was known about the phenomenon of dynamic rollover then, but its limits were surely approached. Who could fish in that kind of weather? The bad guys did.

### "White Scarves and Windlasses"

Opinion about the future of the ship/helicopter team was rather evenly divided among vessel commanding officers in those days. A "use 'em or lose 'em" philosophy seemed to exist with respect to the flight deck equipped cutters. Some skippers felt somehow cheated if forced to get underway without aviation hardware on deck. Others made it abundantly clear that a helicopter chained to the deck was a safe bet. Aviators learned to quickly ascertain the prevailing mood as soon as possible after arrival. Reasons for tension were easily understood. Aircraft accident boards had a penchant for hanging blame squarely on the CO supervisor's shoulders. Aviators were perceived as egomaniacs who normally ventured forth to collect medals on SAR cases, but had to be back before crew duty limitations (or "happy hour") expired. Flight quarters aboard the cutters was an "all hands" evolution which inevitably disrupted the ship's routine. The helicopter required precious distilled fresh water to prevent corrosion, etc., etc. Pilots became adept at disarming predispositions by offering helicopter rides, fetching mail and newspapers, and sewing the ship's patch on their flightsuit.

### "The Caribbean Diversion"

The summer of 1974 yielded an ambitious quantum leap in force projection for the Coast Guard. Something big was stirring in the Miami headquarters of the Seventh Coast Guard District. Dubbed "Operation Buccaneer", a joint surveillance and interdiction effort involving the Coast Guard, Customs Service, and Drug Enforcement Agency was designed to blockade the Windward Passage between Cuba and Haiti, thereby denying drug smugglers their preferred route northward from Jamaica and Colombia.

Ships and aircraft from other





C-130 on fishery patrol over Soviet factory ship.

districts augmented Seventh District resources on the "front lines". Helicopters leap-frogged from ship to ship, providing highly reliable surveillance in the excellent prevailing weather. Aviation personnel could join in the enthusiasm attendant to a "bust" by their cutter.

A 210 foot WMEC and her helicopter intercepted a southbound shrimper quite by accident. Normally only northbound vessels laden with illicit cargo were targets for interdiction. During the ensuing routing "safety" inspection, weapons, a large quantity of U.S. currency, and conspiratorial paperwork were discovered. The young master and his two passengers, a furloughed airline co-pilot and an ex-Florida State Attorney were arrested initially on charges of taking more than \$5000 outside of the country without State Department approval. The vessel, valued in excess of a half million dollars and equipped with more sophisticated electronic navigation gear than the cutter, was seized. A custody crew composed of a ship's officer and the helicopter aviation personnel sailed the shrimper to a rendezvous in the old Bahama Channel with another WMEC. On the second day of the journey, a curious Second Class Aviation Machinist's Mate discovered

a secret compartment in the vessel's hold containing a trash compactor and hundreds of plastic garbage bags.

Later during the same operation, daylight aerial reconnaissance of the pass resulted in a late night interception of a U.S.-registered sailing yacht. The five youthful crewmembers refused to submit to a Coast Guard boarding. Following consultation with shoreside intel, it was agreed that the cutter should trail the suspect through the night and avoid confrontation until daylight. The General Quarters alarm sounded at 0400 hours in response to a terse situation. The yacht crew had started the auxiliary engine, lashed the rudder hard over, set the boat afire, and jumped overboard into the darkness. In quick succession, the WMEC CO launched his small boat to recover the persons in the water, skillfully laid the yacht alongside his bow (helicopter blades were overhanging the flight deck rails aft), and commenced firefighting/dewatering operations. Aviation personnel eagerly participated. At first light the yacht slipped beneath the waves, and all who had worked diligently to save her were disappointed. Soon, however, the first of over fifty bales of contraband began popping to the surface. After retrieving and sealing several as evidence the re-

mainder were sunk with .50 caliber machinegun fire. The helicopter was employed to transfer both prisoners and evidence to another cutter 24 hours later.

Several days later the ship encountered a northbound sport fishing craft which had been observed by the helicopter a week previously on an apparent course for Jamaica. As the sea state in the pass made boarding risky, the suspect U.S. boat was requested to follow the cutter into the lee of a nearby land mass. After the evening meal, many of the sailors and airmen gathered on the flight deck to sip coffee and speculate about the results of the prospective boarding. Seconds later a huge plume of smoke and flying debris obscured the boat as an ear-splitting explosion resounded across the 200 yards of water which separated her from the cutter. Once again General Quarters was announced as the ship swung about; no time to lower a boat, as the two dazed occupants of the sport fisher swam frantically away from their blazing craft. A boarding net was hastily swung over the side, but both men seemed strangely reluctant to clamber aboard the cutter. The realization suddenly dawned on everyone that they were "buying time" for their vessel to burn to the waterline and



sink. Instinctively, a Warrant Officer with one of the boarding parties yelled a thinly veiled threat, and with the wave of his .45 caliber pistol both bad guys seemed to "walk on water" in their haste to scramble aboard. The gutted hull of a once-beautiful boat was found to be literally jammed with marijuana.

### 1976-1978: "The Battle of the Bering Sea"

With the passage of the Fishery Conservation and Management Act of 1976, the Coast Guard gained exclusive jurisdiction over a Fisheries Conservation Zone extending seaward for 200 nautical miles from the U.S. shoreline. Contrary to popular opinion, there is no "200 mile limit" within which foreign fishermen are forbidden. Instead, foreign governments apply and pay for permits which enable their vessels to conduct a directed fishery for an allocation of certain species. Vessels are required to check in and out of designated areas with Coast Guard district headquarters by radio. With the enactment of the FCMA on 1 March 1977, Coast Guard Cutters began conducting enforcement boardings, as opposed to consensual boardings. The goal of these boardings remains the strict compliance of a vessel with the terms of its permit. Certain species such as halibut and king crab are prohibited, requiring an immediate return to the sea as soon as a catch can be sorted.

Since the Western Aleutian salmon fishery, for example, attracted as many as 600 Japanese vessels to Alaskan

waters each summer, and since a monthly average of 300 (mostly communist bloc) vessels were engaged in harvesting the rich bounty of the Gulf of Alaska and Bering Sea year-round, verification placed a heavy strain on Coast Guard resources. In 1977, nearly every six to ten hour HC-130 patrol originating daily from Coast Guard Air Station Kodiak carried a NMFS agent or USCG helicopter pilot who functioned as an aerial "fish cop". During multiple "rigging runs" at 150 knots and 200 feet, the "Herks" zig-zagged over 1500 track miles of the Gulf of Alaska, Aleutian Chain, or Bering Sea. In a brief glance through the lens of a 35mm camera with autowinder, the vessel's name, homeport, International Radio Call Sign, and activity was noted and recorded together with position, course and speed. Comparison of sighting reports with historical data from a "management information system" computer in Juneau permitted the selective interception and boarding of high interest targets.

The customary parade of intense Siberian low pressure systems marching across the Bering Sea seldom prevented "Alaska Patrols" by C-130's or H-52 helicopters. The latter, equipped with a lightweight airborne radar and guided by x-band transponders and shipboard TACAN installations, were deployed aboard 378-foot cutters arriving in Alaskan waters from the Pacific Coast and Hawaii. It was the Coast Guard version of "WESTPAC" with stateside vessels augmenting Alaskan forces

through temporary additional duty. H-52 crews left their families in Kodiak for up to seventy days of continuous reconnaissance duty. During one memorable October storm, mountainous seas washed over the flight deck, lifting the helicopter against the restraint of primary chain tiedowns and sweeping the wooden landing grid overboard. Winds clocked in excess of 100 knots parted a rigid blade boot, causing a main rotor blade to pivot about its flapping hinge and stand straight on end in a spectacular instant of violent destruction.

The doctrine of hot pursuit became unnecessary. A stern chase was unlikely with the advent of 200-mile jurisdiction. Even citations issued by aircraft could result in stiff fines or revocation of permit by a U.S. magistrate. Acts of provocation were rare, but the ship's boarding party remained a vulnerable pawn in the tense confrontation between a cutter and suspected violator. In the quest for added safety, the deployed helicopter was utilized to circumvent pitching boats and rickety ladders in favor of a hoist; weather which presented adversity to a coxswain was seldom more kind to the pilot. Boarding officers endlessly debated warning shots, rounds in the chamber, and the use of deadly force in potentially explosive situations complicated by language barriers and political ideology. It was generally conceded that the cutter and her main battery constituted an ample deterrent. For the airmen it was a moot point; the "black shoes" were taking all of the risks.



Straits of Florida. Vessel "Red Diamond" pounds through heavy seas enroute from Mariel Bay, Cuba to Key West, FL.



### "GIFFIN's RAIDERS"

In May 1977, an HH-3F helicopter was dispatched from Kodiak to the northern reaches of Bristol Bay to police a "joint venture" involving the transfer of herring purchased from native fishermen to a Korean vessel anchored outside territorial waters off the village of Togiak. The flight crew landed on the tundra, launched a rubber assault boat, and the pilots escorted a NMFS agent to the converted longliner. After a screening of the ship's logs and a tour of the pungent salt-storage operation in progress, the master was thanked for his cooperation and the "boarding team" descended a traditional rope ladder to their tethered craft amidst the hostile stares of the Korean crew. The absence of a cutter and associated "gunboat diplomacy" were never more acute. The trip to shore was accentuated by a mysterious leak in one of craft's flotation chambers and high anxiety prevailed over the prospect of completing the journey via backstroke. To add insult to injury, an ebb tide necessitated that the co-pilot dismount and drag the boat through 200 yards of mud to the beach. This elite force, which adopted the name of the aviator then serving as Chief of the Intelligence and Law Enforcement Branch at Seventeenth District headquarters in Juneau, vowed never again to contest the sacred realm of the boarding party.

### 1980: "The Caribbean Theater Revisited"

Since the early sixties, Coast Guard Group Key West had been a sleepy collection of small boat stations, light-houses, and support facilities from Islamorada to Dry Tortugas. In April 1980, Fidel Castro invited a matchbox flotilla of American pleasure and commercial boats to congregate in Mariel harbor west of Havana for the purpose of carrying thousands of political refugees, invalids, mental patients, and hardened criminals to freedom in the U.S. It fell to a hastily assembled "squadron" of Coast Guard Cutters, Navy amphibious task force, and heavily augmented units of Coast Guard Group Key West to prevent a massive disaster as overloaded and unseaworthy craft struggled up the 110-mile trackline to Key West with their human cargo.

By the 17th of May, Group Key West possessed an "air force" of one H-52 and two H-3 helicopters on loan from air stations in Miami, Clearwater, and Elizabeth City (NC). In addition, no less than three (and occasionally as many as five) H-52s were

deployed aboard cutters operating along the Mariel trackline. In view of the fact that much of the Group Commander's attention was absorbed in providing logistical support to seven major vessels, a host of smaller patrol craft, boating safety and marine inspection teams, overseeing the search and rescue effort to 30 miles offshore, and conducting daily briefings for national news media, a temporary formal aviation organization within the Group seemed advisable. No one could predict how long the crisis might last, but if aviation was to continue to play a vital support role the functions of maintenance, operations management, communications and supply were in need of strengthening.

On May 20th, USCG Aviation Detachment Key West was born. Staffed with an "Aviator-in-Charge", an aircraft maintenance officer, an enlisted maintenance supervisor, four H-3 flight crews, three H-52 flight crews, and three seven-man maintenance support sections, it was the equivalent of a miniature air station. NAS Key West graciously allocated ramp space and an office adjacent to the SH-3G SARDET. Ground support equipment and a temporary communications center were airlifted by C-130 from Coast Guard Air Station Clearwater. A supply network was established with the Coast

Guard Aviation Repair and Supply Center (AR&SC) at Elizabeth City, North Carolina whereby helicopter replacement parts would be furnished from stock at Air Stations Miami or Clearwater; critical items normally available only from the inventory control point were expedited overnight by express delivery from ARSC. An aviation liaison officer became one of the key elements of the Group Commander's staff, with a counterpart serving as a link between the Group Commander and the Seventh District Chief of Operations in Miami.

AVDET helicopters averaged eight daylight hours of "boatlift" Patrol in the Group Commander's area of responsibility. One H-3 and the H-52 were maintained on a 24-hour "Bravo Zero" status, ready to proceed within 30 minutes of SAR incident notification. The remaining H-3 was kept on two-hour standby. On the morning of May 17th, an H-52 returning from a routine patrol to a WMEC on station came across a overturned 35 foot cabin cruiser surrounded by nearly fifty persons struggling to survive in eight foot seas. The solo pilot and his crewman recovered eleven people before encountering a complete failure of the helicopter hoist. The AVDET responded within minutes with an H-3 and H-52. Another H-52 launched from a WHEC which was transiting



Straits of Florida. Coast Guardsman adjusts tie-down strap to helo moments after landing aboard the 378-foot Coast Guard Cutter "Dallas."





Haitian people on board "Exorbe", first vessel seized during Haitian Migrant Interdiction Operation by cutter "Chase."

the main ship channel for much deserved replenishment at Key West. After covering fifty miles of open ocean at maximum speed, the H-52s assisted the cutter's small boats in rescuing 27 more survivors, who were rushed to waiting medical facilities aboard USS *Saipan* and NAS Key West. Several days later, an overloaded boat was reported aground and breaking up on the reef south of Boca Chica Key at 0200 hours. This time all three AVDET helicopters were launched and hoisted over fifty persons to safety in the darkness.

In its first month of existence, helicopters assigned to or supported by the AVDET logged over 250 sorties and 500 accident-free flight hours. By late July, over 125,000 refugees had crossed the Straits of Florida while incurring only 45 known fatalities. The real heroes of the "boatlift" crisis were the Coast Guard, Navy, and Marine Corps personnel working at sea with everything from cutters and LSTs to "Mike boats" and 17-foot UTBs. But Coast Guard aviation was proud of its support role in such areas as SAR, reconnaissance, vertical replenishment, VIP transport, and public affairs. More importantly, although the pace was hectic and the skies over the operations area were literally darkened with military and civil aircraft, no aviation

disaster marred this remarkable epic of airmanship.

### 1981: "The Haitian Migrant Interdiction Operation"

By the fall of 1980 and through the Spring and Summer of 1981, the arrival of illegal Haitian economic migrants in South Florida had reached untenable proportions. Thousands had been arrested and detained awaiting deportation proceedings in a Miami facility costing the U.S. taxpayer over \$42 per individual per day. Thousands more evaded Immigration Service dragnets and were assimilated into a blossoming "Little Haiti" in Miami. Most, whose annual per capita income averaged less than \$300 per year, either put up all of their meager lifelong savings or sold themselves into future bondage for a chance to get to the U.S. Hundreds of Haitians have drowned in rickety, overcrowded sailing vessels and a number have drowned attempting to land on the beaches of Miami-Fort Lauderdale. When they left they had been assured by unscrupulous smugglers that it was simply a matter of wading ashore when the boat on which they were concealed made a night approach to the fabulous Miami-Ft. Lauderdale skyline.

In April 1981, a Vice Presidential

Southeast U.S. Task Force was organized to address a comprehensive multi-agency program to combat drug and alien smuggling in the region. The Coast Guard was already preparing an extensive campaign together with the Drug Enforcement Agency and U.S. Customs Service to thwart the lower Caribbean drug pipeline when a simultaneous operation was planned with the State Department and Immigration and Naturalization Service to blockade and deter the Haitian "illegal migrant" smugglers. A force package consisting of a WHEC, an HC-130 and two HH-52 helicopters, augmented with medical teams and I&NS personnel, was deemed appropriate to patrol the international waters in the Windward Passage and surrounding Haiti to identify, examine, board and possibly interdict suspect vessels bound for the U.S. A unique bilateral agreement was negotiated with the government of Haiti to permit collaboration between the Coast Guard and Haitian Navy in order to satisfy the mutual goals of both countries.

NAS Guantanamo Bay, Cuba was deemed to be the most suitable site for aviation support to the On-Scene Commander, whose vessel would patrol the Old Bahama Channel and Windward Passage in an arc around Port du Paix





on the Haitian northwest coast (a notorious smuggling base). Extensive negotiations with the Commander, Naval Base Guantanamo Bay (GTMO), Cuba resulted in an excellent working relationship under an Inter-Service Support Agreement (ISSA) to provide operations, maintenance, supplies and living accommodations for 26 Coast Guard aviation officers and enlisteds at NAS Leeward Point. In return, a successful operation promised to alleviate occasional problems associated with Haitian migrant boats which arrived off of Guantanamo Bay and requested entrance, believing the base to be "the promised land".

Borrowing from the most recent impromptu Key West experience, repre-

sentatives from Seventh District Operations and Air Stations Miami and Clearwater drafted detailed OPERATIONS ORDERS well in advance to delineate personnel tasking, a concept of daily flight support for the On-Scene Commander, a communications plan, and aircraft maintenance/supply procedures for a trial 90-day period. Three C-130 loads of personnel, ground support equipment, communications van, and an extensive H-52/C-130 spare parts allowance began to arrive in GTMO on 5 October 1981. Four days later, USCG Aviation Detachment Guantanamo Bay, Cuba became an operational reality with the first of over sixty uninterrupted daily C-130 patrols lasting an average of four to five hours each. The helicopters

alternated between a week at sea on the WHEC flight deck and a week ashore at NAS for maintenance and logistics service to the cutter. The deployed helicopter ranged extensively throughout the benign flying area, visiting Port Au Prince, Great Inagua, and the Turks and Caicos Islands. The first interdiction of a Haitian migrant vessel occurred in late October with a sighting by the H-52. USCGC CHASE intercepted and removed 56 Haitians (the youngest being 6 months old) from their sinking 35 foot sailing vessel. As soon as they arrived aboard the CGC CHASE, all were given medical examinations and then they were extensively interviewed by the Immigration Service Officer through the Immigration Interpreter to determine if any had



Helicopter operations on Coast Guard Cutter "Chase" during Haitian Migrant Interdiction Operation in October 1981.



valid claims for asylum in the United States. None made claim for asylum and they were returned to Port Au Prince where they were met by officials from the Government of Haiti, the Haitian Red Cross and staff from the American Embassy. The vessel was determined to be unseaworthy and was subsequently sunk.

The purpose of HMIO was and still is to reduce the number of illegal migrants from arriving in the South-eastern United States — specifically the shores between Palm Beach and the Florida Keys. In 1980 there were over 15,094 arrivals, or an average of 1,258 per month or 42 per day. With a cost projection of \$42 + per day to care, clothe, feed and provide medical attention for each illegal arrival in the United States, the Administration is interested in curbing the number of illegals. In 1981 there were two months when over 1,507 and 1,717 arrived prior to the start of HMIO. A savings figure of almost \$467K per day has been given by INS as compared with a \$35K out of pocket expenditure for the Coast Guard to run the HMIO. Since October 1981, the number of landed illegal migrants in the Miami area have dropped dramatically to less than 120 per year. The reduction held until this Spring when on April 4th, 29 Haitians in their 20-foot sailboat "appeared" just off the Hollywood Beach claiming that they had been at sea for "many days" and had come all the way from Haiti. Even after intensive debriefing by Immigration officials, the story remained that they had come from Haiti; however, medical examinations indicated they had only been in the boat a few hours to possibly two days. Two days later, on April 6th, late in the afternoon Station Islamorada in the Florida Keys reported another Haitian Sailboat "full" of Haitians. Indeed it was, 72 men, women, and children were crowded into a 36-foot roughly built sailing vessel. They too claimed they had been to sea for almost a month and had come all the way from Haiti without stopping. Their debriefings proved they had most likely stopped in Cuba and had been assisted along the way. These two isolated occurrences led to an increased effort along the Northern end of the Haitian Pipeline add a Medium Endurance cutter and a Patrol Boat plus numerous Falcon and H-52 hours have been dedicated to "check and see" if there is anybody else in the pipeline. In a recent six-week period, the Coast Guard

turned back 37 found in the sea off Guantanamo, and another 23 Haitians, 5 Indians, and one Jamaican were returned to their home countries without incident.

It seemed that the AVDET's efforts met with enthusiasm by hundreds of military members and their families at Guantanamo. In one instance, the shore-based H-52 airlifted a gravely ill dependent child from the Naval Base hospital across the bay to a waiting Air Force medevac C-141 at NAS Leeward Point. Weekly USCG C-130 "space A" flights to CONUS in conjunction with aircraft changeouts to facilitate major maintenance at Clearwater filled a need for many military personnel. The Coasties enjoyed a strong camaraderie with the Marines of the Leeward Point Ground Defense Force and toured the base perimeter to learn about life on "The Rock".

The AVDET piled up over 750 accident-free flight hours in the first three months of operation. In addition to a constant rotation of CGAS Clearwater C-130 crews, H-52 pilots, crew, and helicopters from Coast Guard Air Stations Cape Code, Brooklyn, Cape May, Savannah, Miami, Houston, Corpus Christi and Traverse City served aboard the HMIO cutter and at the AVDET. One interesting "spin off" of the HMIO was a dramatic increase in drug smugglers apprehended by the WHEC as she sat astride the Windward Passage "choke point" during the fall harvest season. Eighteen months have passed since the start of HMIO and the AVDET . . . the Coast Guard has compiled an impressive set of statistics in their efforts:

Cutters have been underway 10,446 hours, steamed 97,452 miles while aircraft and helicopters in support of the mission have flown 3,775 accident free hours.

Together they have sighted 755 vessels in the operating area, positively identified 200 who are engaged in "Haitian trade" and boarded 178 vessels, interdicted 13 vessels and have successfully returned 287 (as of 23 May 83) economic migrants to Haiti under the auspices of the Government of Haiti, the Haitian Red Cross and supervision of the American Embassy in Port Au Prince.

It could be said that the Haitian Migrant Interdiction Operation, once thought to be a temporary fix in the Windward Passage to stem the flow of illegal migrants is just the most recent chapter in a continuing saga of the "air war" in the Caribbean basin.



CDR Mont J. Smith, USCG, graduated from the U.S. Coast Guard Academy in 1968 and served for 20 months as a deck watch officer aboard USCGC "Diligence" in Key West. He received his wings and an MS degree in aeronautical systems in 1971, following completion of a unique flight training program sponsored by the Navy and University of West Florida. His first aviation tour as a helicopter reconnaissance pilot aboard polar icebreakers was followed by search and rescue duty at Coast Guard Air Stations Cape Cod, Kodiak, and Clearwater. During the height of the 1980 Cuban refugee exodus, he was designated "aviator-in-charge" of a 50-man temporary aviation detachment at NAS Key West, coordinating forward-based support for up to nine helicopters patrolling the "boatlift". In October 1981, he was dispatched to NAS Guantanamo Bay, Cuba to establish a temporary aviation detachment consisting of one C-130 and two HH-52A helicopters dedicated to the Haitian Migrant Interdiction Operation. The HMIO aviation effort, originally planned for 90 days, is still underway today. CDR Smith currently is serving as the Operations Officer at Coast Guard Air Station, Elizabeth City, N. C.



Commander James Park Sutherland, United States Coast Guard, graduated in 1964 from Bowling Green State University in Ohio and was commissioned in 1965 through OCS. He served at the Captain of the Port, New Orleans, LA and as XO aboard CGC PT "Young" and PT "Grey" in Vietnam prior to entering Navy Flight Training in 1968. Since then he has served as Public Affairs Officer at CGAS Corpus Christi, TX followed by a tour as Chief, Retired Affairs Branch at CG Headquarters in Washington. He returned to aviation in 1966 at CGAS Miami flying both helicopters and fixed wing aircraft in support of SAR and Law Enforcement deployments and the Cuban Sealift of 1980. In the summer of 1981, CDR Sutherland was transferred to the Seventh Coast Guard District Office to become the Operations Special Assistant which has evolved into the Project Officer for the Haitian Migrant Interdiction Operation.