



**Guardians of the Gulf: A History of Coast Guard Combat
Operations in Support of Operation Iraqi Freedom, 2002-2004**

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Introduction

Units and personnel of the United States Coast Guard and its predecessor services have served with distinction in every major American conflict since the founding of the United States and Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) proved no exception to this rule. In OIF, the Coast Guard excelled in its specialties of port security, coastal and environmental security, and maritime interdiction operations. At the height of combat operations, 1,250 Coast Guard personnel served in OIF and 500 of those service members were activated Coast Guard Reservists. Coast Guard vessels and land-based personnel brought many vital capabilities to the theater of operations that the United States Navy could not. Coast Guard cutters operated in a variety of roles not conducive to naval warships and the white hulls of Coast Guard vessels provided a less antagonizing presence in a highly volatile region.

Planning for Coast Guard Operations

Initial preparations for naval operations supporting OIF began with the U.S. Navy in the summer and fall of 2002. The navy drew upon its standing contingency plans for combat operations involving Iraq and, in September 2002, U.S. Naval Forces Central Command (NAVCENT) requested U.S. Coast Guard support for a mission termed “Operation Iraqi Freedom.” The navy saw the Coast Guard’s cutters and skilled personnel as ideally suited to naval operations supporting Operation Iraqi Freedom. The shallow coastal areas and waterways of Iraq are subject to heavy silting and strategists believed that Iraq’s primary threat to American naval units came from small boats, patrol craft and mine laying vessels. The Coast Guard’s patrol boats would expand the naval presence to shallow littoral areas where larger naval combatants could not navigate and Coast Guard cutters could remain on station for days as opposed to only a few hours typical of the navy’s Special Forces boats. In addition, the law enforcement background of Coast Guard personnel would expand the navy’s ability to intercept and board Iraqi vessels and Coast Guard cutters could serve in force protection and escort duty, thereby freeing naval assets to conduct offensive combat operations.

The navy called on the Coast Guard to perform missions that have always formed part of the service’s peace-time mission. The navy had very limited capability in boarding, maritime interdiction and even environmental protection and yet operations in Iraq would require units

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trained in these operations. As a result, the Coast Guard's Port Security Units (PSUs), Law Enforcement Detachments (LEDETs), National Strike Force (NSF), cutters and a variety of other units and personnel deployed overseas to support military operations in OIF. These units included cutters assigned to provide escort and force protection to battle groups and Military Sealift Command (MSC) convoys passing from the Strait of Gibraltar to the eastern Mediterranean.

As it had in previous American combat operations, the Coast Guard conducted operations well suited to cutters and their crews. The maritime conditions of Iraq and the Northern Arabian Gulf (NAG) can greatly limit the operations of most naval vessels and warships. U.S.-led Coalition forces that allied against the Iraqi regime of Saddam Hussein included Gulf-based nations that had their own coast guard forces. However, these particular Coalition forces dedicated the use of their smaller vessels to protecting Kuwait, rather than operations in Iraqi territorial waters. Due to this and the Coast Guard's expertise in littoral and shallow-water operations, a large part of the request by United States Central Command (CENTCOM) centered on the Coast Guard's smaller patrol boats. Although various Coast Guard units and personnel had served in operations Desert Shield and Desert Storm in the 1990s, deployment of the service's 110-foot patrol boats overseas would represent the first combat deployment of Coast Guard patrol boats since the Vietnam War.

Preparation for Deployment

Even though the Coast Guard served a similar mission in Vietnam, there existed no operational plan to provide guidance for OIF planning and preparations. The Coast Guard began its earliest preparations in the final months of 2002 and the lack of any pre-existing plan or blueprint for this sort of mission proved the Coast Guard's greatest challenge. In addition, the Coast Guard had never organized such a command structure and planners had to create new lists of equipment and personnel requirements from scratch. Lastly, only military commands in the theater of operations knew the time frame for commencement of hostilities, and Coast Guard personnel believed they had as little as twenty days to prepare before they would deploy overseas.

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Early preparations for Coast Guard deployment proceeded quickly. The service's Atlantic Area Command (LANTAREA), headquartered in Portsmouth, Virginia, created a shore detachment to support its cutter operations overseas. These patrol forces detachments would oversee all aspects of operational support, including cutter maintenance and crew rotation. In October, LANTAREA created a shore detachment to oversee personnel, supply and maintenance requirements for patrol boat operations in the Arabian Gulf. It designated this detachment as Patrol Forces, Southwest Asia (PATFORSWA). LANTAREA assigned an officer in charge (OIC) of PATFORSWA and selected four 110-foot Island-class patrol boats (WPBs) for the mission based on their superior maintenance records. These WPBs included Adak, Aquidneck, Baranof and Wrangell. LANTAREA created a second shore detachment for patrol boat operations in the Mediterranean; designated it Patrol Forces, Mediterranean (PATFORMED); and selected four more patrol boats for Mediterranean service. These WPBs included Bainbridge Island, Grand Isle, Knight Island and Pea Island. LANTAREA ordered all of the patrol boats and personnel to report to the Integrated Support Center (ISC) in Portsmouth for training, patrol boat maintenance and technical preparations.

LANTAREA prepared PATFORSWA patrol boats and personnel to deploy on an earlier schedule than their PATFORMED counterparts; however, their work-up routines were very similar. The command built the PATFORSWA staff around a core group of the seventeen-member crew from the 110-foot cutter Sapelo, and Sapelo's commanding officer became PATFORSWA's executive officer. LANTAREA drew from over twenty of its subsidiary commands to assemble a PATFORSWA staff numbering over fifty members. The support staff would also include elements of a Mobile Support Unit (MSU), a reserve unit comprised of machinery technicians. Half-a-dozen MSU personnel joined PATFORSWA from Baltimore's Engineering and Logistics Command, a command specifically designed to provide for the logistical needs of patrol boats deployed to regions lacking any base of operations. The MSU personnel began training in October along with the rest of PATFORSWA's personnel.

By November, PATFORSWA crew members formulated plans specific to the conditions they would face in the theater of operations. The OIC led a PATFORSWA advance team to the Arabian Gulf in mid-November to determine the sort of support facilities offered by the host

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country and how best to prepare for deployment to the Arabian Gulf. The port city of Manama, Bahrain, hosted the naval headquarters of Naval Support Activity Bahrain (NSA) requiring PATFORSWA staff to locate their base of operations in the vicinity. NSA hosted a variety of posts necessary to PATFORSWA, including NAVCENT, the U.S. Fifth Fleet, and the operational commander for Coast Guard cutters forces, Destroyer Squadron 50 (DESRON 50).

Initially, the Coast Guard units deploying to support OIF prepared for rapid deployment, but transportation problems altered those plans. LANTAREA planners expected a twenty-day work-up period to prepare PATFORSWA personnel for deployment. This work-up period increased to three months due to shipping bottlenecks and out-load delays. Much of the problem stemmed from delays experienced by the Military Sealift Command, which had to carry all U.S. military forces to the theater of operations. From November 2002 through January 2003, while PATFORSWA and PATFORMED awaited deployment, their personnel would receive training that proved crucial to their success overseas.

LANTAREA implemented training for deploying units designed specifically to the requirements of OIF. All personnel received standard law-enforcement training and an emergency operational procedures course for damage control and emergency response. With force protection training, weapons qualifications became essential. Unit members trained in the use of pistols, shot guns, M-16s and deck guns. This weapons training became so intensive that it depleted local ammunition stocks to critical levels. Certain personnel received rear-area security training at the U.S. Marine Corps' Special Mission Training Center at Camp Lejeune, North Carolina. The training covered a variety of topics, including convoy procedures, establishing defensive perimeters and force protection doctrine; and it served as a good team-building experience. Later, members of the boarding teams received a special weapons and tactics course at Blackwater USA, Incorporated, in North Carolina.

The extended work-up period provided more time to inspect the WPBs for maintenance problems and upgrade the cutters for service in a hostile environment. During the delay in Hampton Roads, each of the WPBs received upgrades for overseas service. First, maintenance crews addressed all of the cutters' mechanical problems. These crews also added two .50 caliber

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machine gun mounts aft of the pilothouse to supplement the firepower of the forward-mounted MK38 25mm gun. Most of the modifications fell within the area of communications, including new high-frequency transceivers, installation of satellite telephones and a number of improvements designed to reduce electromagnetic interference. Work crews installed new high-strength Kevlar lifelines around the decks and Forward-Looking Infrared Receivers (FLIR) on the cutters' masts for nighttime operations. Each WPB also received night vision goggles; a translating bullhorn; and chemical, biological and radiological (CBR) gear.

Coast Guard planners also increased the patrol boats' boarding capability. Each cutter received four Law Enforcement Detachment (LEDET) personnel to bring crew size up to full combat readiness. Coast Guard planners expected this crew augmentation to improve the WPBs maritime interception operations (MIO) capability, which would help the cutters to fulfill their primary mission in the Arabian Gulf. Work crews also added extra bunks in the aft berthing area of each WPB to provide for the war-time crew complement. Even so, certain crewmembers still had to practice "hot bunking," with different watches sharing the same bunks.

PATFORSWA and PATFORMED personnel underwent other deployment preparations as their jumping-off date drew near. Unit members received special government credit cards and prepared wills and powers of attorney and made other legal arrangements. Coast Guard medical facilities screened all personnel and provided the necessary inoculations, including anthrax and smallpox immunizations. Due to the history of chemical weapons use by the Iraqi regime, all unit personnel received CBR warfare training as well as specially-fitted CBR protective masks and gear.

While LANTAREA units prepared to deploy for OIF, units and personnel from other parts of the country prepared to deploy overseas as well. For example, the service mobilized Coast Guard Reservists to provide security at U.S. ports used by Military Sealift Command for out-loading personnel and equipment to the Middle East. These Reserve forces would provide the backbone of out-load security during the crucial deployment period from January through March 2003. In addition, the Coast Guard's Pacific Area (PACAREA) received orders to deploy units and personnel to the Middle East. Toward the end of 2002, PACAREA notified the 378-

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foot high-endurance cutter (WHEC) Boutwell of its future assignment. Boutwell had vital capabilities to support the Coalition's naval forces, including an over-the-horizon rigid-hull inflatable boat (RHIB), search and rescue (SAR) helicopter capability and boarding teams trained in non-compliant boardings. The cutter had already been scheduled for a routine deployment to the Gulf in early 2003, but planners modified the crew's pre-deployment training when it became clear that the vessel would participate in combat operations.

PACAREA received another request to assign a major asset to Operation Iraqi Freedom. NAVCENT required an ocean-going buoy tender, not for aids-to-navigation (ATON) requirements, but for environmental disaster response. OIF planners believed that the Iraqi regime could engage in acts of environmental warfare as it had at the end of the First Gulf War. PACAREA selected the 225-foot sea-going buoy tender (WLB) Walnut, home-ported in Honolulu, Hawaii. Like other buoy tenders in its class, Walnut carried a special spilled-oil recovery system that could skim over 400 gallons of oil per minute and pump the oil into 20,000 gallon inflatable barges. The buoy tender received additional small arms and two extra .50 caliber machine guns for a total of four .50 calibers along the deck rail. This provided added firepower to defend against potential small-craft attacks while serving in the theater of operations. Walnut also added four additional crewmembers, including one to aid with CBR preparations and three others to support twenty-four hour radio coverage. Walnut's crew also received pre-deployment small arms training and CBR drills.

Deployment of Coast Guard Forces to the Middle East

Coast Guard units and personnel began to deploy to the Middle East by early January 2003. On January 3, 2003, Boutwell departed its home port of Coast Guard Island, in Alameda, California. The high-endurance cutter steamed to Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, where it joined an Amphibious Ready Group (ARG) led by the amphibious carrier USS Tarawa. Before the cutter passed out of Hawaiian waters, an HH-65 Dolphin helicopter assigned to Coast Guard Air Station Barber's Point alighted on board carrying an extra pilot and added mechanics to allow for extended hours of operation. The ready group relied on Boutwell's Dolphin to serve as a designated search and rescue (SAR) aircraft as it steamed toward the Arabian Gulf. On January 13, Boutwell departed Hawaii with the ready group in the fleet's transit across the Pacific and

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Indian oceans. With the ready group's fast transit speed of eighteen knots, Boutwell had to rely on its auxiliary high-speed gas turbine engines to keep up the pace.

Walnut lacked any official orders when it began its passage to the Arabian Gulf. NAVCENT's request for the Walnut had gone up to CENTCOM and on to the Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS). The request specified an arrival date no later than February 28, but the deployment order had not yet been signed by Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld. With Walnut's best economical transit speed of around thirteen knots, PACAREA planners realized that the WLB had to get underway a month before the arrival date regardless of formal authorization. On January 18, Walnut left Honolulu and steamed toward Guam while PACAREA planners awaited the official deployment order. At Guam, Walnut loaded extra equipment for oil spill capability. From there, Walnut continued on to Singapore, which is the limit of the buoy tender's normal area of responsibility (AOR).

During that final leg of Walnut's passage, Rumsfeld signed the order so the buoy tender could proceed. Walnut had additional concerns during that part of the passage. Piracy had remained a concern for commercial shipping in the Strait of Malacca, especially for small slow coastal freighters with low freeboard and the 225-foot WLB resembled this sort of vessel. To counter the threat of piratical attack, Walnut placed extra lookouts on the bridge and fantail, providing each with night vision goggles during the evening, and prepared fire hoses and small arms for rapid response. Walnut transited the area without incident and continued on to rendezvous with other U.S. Navy and Coast Guard units in the Gulf. Walnut's deployment to OIF would represent the first out-of-hemisphere combat deployment of a buoy tender since the Vietnam War.

While Boutwell and Walnut deployed to the Gulf, an advance team hit the ground in Bahrain to arrange for the requirements of PATFORSWA. On January 15, the OIC touched down while the executive officer and other staff arrived within a week. The OIC met with the staff of Task Force 55 and DESRON 50 with which the cutters would operate. PATFORSWA's command staff arranged for housing, transportation, communications, computer connectivity, work space and all other support functions. They would face plenty of challenges with

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summertime temperatures averaging well over 100 degrees Fahrenheit and periodic sandstorms that filled the skies with dust clouds and deposited a layer of fine brown particles on everything in their wake.

To support operations, PATFORSWA personnel had to set up housing and a base of operations. The advance team leased a compound, located very close to the U.S. Navy's Harbor Patrol Unit, which had housed a Coast Guard port security unit only a year earlier. The PATFORSWA team also leased housing in a set of apartments known as the Seef Residence, located about twenty minutes by car from the PATFORSWA compound. The Seef Residence also provided housing for WPB cutter crews during their rotation off patrol duty. In addition to its housing and support facility, PATFORSWA docked its vessels at a pier located at the Mina Salman port facility about a ten-minute drive from the compound. U.S. naval forces could only occupy a 400-meter stretch of the pier's 900-meter length, so vessel shifting became a common occurrence for Coast Guard cutters.

LANTAREA planners believed the WPBs were too small for a trans-Atlantic crossing, so the Coast Guard had to rely on MSC's heavy-lift vessels to ship the patrol boats overseas. The Coast Guard had used similar trans-shipment methods to get the eighty-two foot Point-class patrol boats to Southeast Asia during the Vietnam War; however, the larger 110s proved a greater challenge than the smaller Point-class boats. In the late 1990s, the Coast Guard Yard in Curtis Bay, Maryland, had fabricated cradles specifically designed to secure the WPBs upright for dry-docking, transport on ships, or other purposes. The capability of transporting the WPBs on board heavy-lift ships had been part of the original conception when designing the cradles for the Island-class cutters. The Coast Guard shipped these cradles from a storage facility in California to the East Coast to provide a secure platform for the WPBs during their ride on the MSC heavy-lift vessels.

Trans-shipment of the 110-foot cutters overseas required a great deal of logistical work. By January 2003, Coast Guard crews had prepared the four PATFORSWA 110s for loading onto the commercial heavy-lift vessel Motor Vessel Industrial Challenger. To shed cutter weight, work crews removed all excess equipment and drainable fluids bringing each WPB's weight

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down from 165 tons to 125. The cutters still weighed too much for the capacity of the Industrial Challenger's cranes, so logistics experts stationed cranes capable of lifting over 140 tons at the on-load and off-load sites. During on-loading, Virginia's winter temperatures and contract disputes complicated the operation, but cranes lifted all four cutters on board by January 29. On February 22, cranes lifted the four PATFORMED 110s on the MSC-contracted vessel, M/V BBC Spain; however, on February 23 high winds in the Hampton Roads area caused the vessel's mooring lines to part. Crews quickly re-secured the fully-loaded vessel and it departed for the Mediterranean on February 25.

In the early weeks of 2003, Task Force 55's command deployed Coast Guard units arriving in the theater of operations for patrol duties and maritime interdiction operations. On February 6, Boutwell's ready group had entered the Gulf and the high-endurance cutter joined Task Force 55. By mid-month, Boutwell received orders to patrol south of the Iraqi off-shore oil terminals, Khawr al-Amaya Oil Terminal (KAAOT) and Mina al Bakr Oil Terminal (MABOT), where Coalition naval forces directed all commercial vessel traffic for boarding by Boutwell's boarding teams. Boutwell spent the next thirty-five days patrolling a box only six miles on each side and boarding commercial vessels to enforce the United Nations' U.N. Resolution 986 regulations regarding Iraqi shipping. On February 27, a day before Walnut's arrival deadline, the buoy tender moored at Mohammad Al-Ahmad Kuwait Naval Base (KNB) and changed operational command to Task Force 55. Walnut joined Boutwell in MIO operations enforcing United Nations sanctions.

Other PACAREA units preparing to deploy to the Middle East included two Coast Guard port security units (PSUs). Prior to OIF, the Coast Guard had supported six PSUs that protected American shipping and port facilities. Ever since the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2002, all had kept busy. PSUs had a complement of up to half-a-dozen active duty staff and approximately 130 Coast Guard Reserve personnel. Each unit came equipped with twenty-five-foot Boston Whaler style motor boats armed with a 7.62mm machine gun. The PSUs in the Gulf would operate under the command of the navy's Naval Coast Warfare Group (NCWG) One, which controlled a variety of harbor defense and in-shore boat units (IBUs), including Harbor Defense

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Command Unit 114, a joint Navy-Coast Guard unit deployed to oversee the off-loading of military cargoes, including tanks, trucks, helicopters and containers.

Shortly after Thanksgiving 2002, members of San Pedro, California's PSU 311 learned that they would deploy to the Middle East to serve in support of OIF. It had only been a few months since PSU 311's April 2002 return from a six-month deployment to the Gulf. But by mid-February 2003 the unit packed its gear and began its trip to the Middle East on board aircraft flying from March Air Force Base in Riverside, California. PSU 311 had received orders to guard KNB and arrived on site on February 20.

More port security units would follow as the need for these specialized units increased in the theater of operations. On February 17, Tacoma, Washington-based PSU 313 out-loaded from McCord Air Force Base and began its trip to the Middle East. As with PSU 311, PSU 313 shipped its equipment, including boats, vehicles and ammunition on board cargo aircraft, while the personnel flew on board chartered jetliners. PSU 313 received orders to deploy to Kuwait to begin port security operations at the commercial port of Ash Shuaybah. PSU 313 arrived in Kuwait at the same time as PSU 311.

LANTAREA assigned one of its PSUs overseas to support operations in the Mediterranean. In late January 2003, Port Clinton, Ohio's PSU 309 received orders for deployment on February 5. That began an epic journey to Italy that took several days and included a number of different transport aircraft with stops in Kentucky, North Carolina, and Ireland before arriving at Sigonella Naval Air Station in Sicily, Italy. After PSU 309 arrived in Sicily, the unit came under the command of Naval Coastal Warfare Unit (NCWU) 2 and prepared to maintain security for a NATO pier facility in Augusta Bay, Sicily, where PATFORMED WPBs would berth. PSU 309's operational status would remain on hold, however, due to the reluctance of the host country to provide bases for Coast Guard operations.

By the end of February, most of the Coast Guard's personnel participating in OIF had arrived at their respective base of operations. Shortly after the members of PSU 313 and PSU 311 arrived in Kuwait, the main body of PATFORSWA personnel boarded a U.S. Airways jet

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bound for Bahrain. Their numbers comprised crews for four WPBs, including the four-member LEDET teams assigned to each cutter; the main contingent of support personnel for the PATFORSWA Bahrain base; and the MSU Baltimore personnel who shipped their support trailers full of parts, tools and equipment by separate means. On February 26, the PATFORSWA personnel arrived in Bahrain and the work tempo increased. Shortly after arriving, the patrol boat skippers had to board USS Valley Forge, a guided missile cruiser and command ship for Task Force 55, under which the cutters would operate. Navy captain John W. Peterson, the task force's commander had specifically requested use of the patrol boats during the September 2002 planning for OIF naval operations. Peterson and his staff briefed the skippers on their upcoming mission and the littoral combat operations about to begin.

Shortly after arriving, the PATFORSWA support crew busied itself turning the compound into a support facility and modifying it so the compound could house all personnel in case of elevated security requirements. PATFORSWA personnel equipped the compound with a berthing and lounge area, parking area for its trailers, offices for each department, sand bags for force protection and camouflage netting for shade from the sun. Equipment housed on base included the eight MSU trailers, small arms, a portable armory, a spare cutter engine and CBR detection and decontamination equipment. These preparations and the equipment would enable the support base to service the 110s whenever they returned from patrol.

Pre-Combat Coast Guard Operations in the Gulf

As PATFORSWA began operating, the detachment's mission changed from its original pre-deployment form to a new more inclusive mission. The crew from Sapelo, originally intended to serve as a relief for individuals on board deployed cutters, found few opportunities to serve in that role. The OIC of PATFORSWA became a full-time liaison officer to DESRON 50 and the executive officer of PATFORSWA soon became assistant operations officer for DESRON 50. PATFORSWA had also begun its duties without providing for any force protection requirements; however, it soon became apparent that it would assume that mission around the clock within the compound confines. The navy also tasked PATFORSWA with supporting its 170-foot Cyclone-class patrol craft Chinook and Firebolt due to the patrol crafts' similarities to the Coast Guard WPBs in terms of size, mission and systems. The two PCs had

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crossed the Atlantic and transited the Mediterranean on their own without the need for a transport vessel. In addition, PATFORSWA would have to provide some logistical, technical and operational support for Boutwell, Walnut, and other units deploying in the theater of operations.

The patrol boats arrived after the PATFORSWA personnel and, with their delivery, the work tempo increased still further. Within ten days of the PATFORSWA personnel's arrival, the 110s appeared in Bahrain having ridden the M/V Industrial Challenger for about thirty-five days. On March 5, a heavy-lift crane off-loaded the cutters taking only six hours to set all of them in the water. The cutter crews conducted sea trials for two days after off-loading and stowed stores on board the patrol boats on March 8. On March 9, Adak and Aquidneck proceeded to the NAG followed by Baranof and Wrangell on March 12. PATFORSWA sent the patrol boats out with staggered departures so they would not return simultaneously and overwhelm the PATFORSWA support staff.

The 110s began operations as soon as they arrived in the theater of operations. The four WPBs joined a Coalition force of nearly 150 ships inhabiting the NAG, so smuggling of goods decreased considerably before the start of combat operations. The navy assigned each patrol boat and PC to a larger Coalition naval vessel, which served as a "sister ship" for periodic stops to replenish food, fuel, and water and to wash laundry. The WPBs and navy PCs operated in the shallow coastal areas cutting off further smuggling and potential maritime escape routes.

The patrol boats' mission underwent a great deal of change during their initial deployment. Prior to the combat operations, smuggling oil and other commodities out of Iraq had become commonplace. Also, a great deal of legal commerce took place through smaller indigenous watercraft, such as locally built wood and steel dhows. In 2002, the prevalence of water traffic had convinced navy and Coast Guard planners to augment WPB crews with the four-member LEDET boarding teams. However, no vessels attempted to enter Iraqi waters prior to combat operations due to the heavy naval presence in the NAG and the fact that the Iraqi regime began to detain smuggling vessels trying to leave Iraqi waters. With this lack of boarding opportunities, ordinary WPB watch standers, such as officers of the deck and engineers of the watch, replaced the four-member LEDET teams.

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Tensions grew in the NAG in the days prior to hostilities. The Iraqi navy operated four ninety-foot patrol boats, also known as PB-90s, which typically carried small-caliber cannon, heavy machine guns and portable weapons, such as rocket-propelled grenades. On March 15, the cutter Wrangell had a harrowing experience with one of the Iraqi patrol boats. During the day, Wrangell had been checking on anchored vessels near the KAAOT when two Iraqi vessels approached and tied up to one of the ships. As Wrangell came in for a closer look, the WPB crew noticed that one of vessels, a tug, had an Iraqi military crew on board. The second vessel, an Iraqi PB-90, came within fifty yards of Wrangell to cut off the WPB's approach, and tried to train its aft 20mm gun on the patrol boat. Wrangell's own 25mm gun proved inoperable at the time, so commanding officer Lieutenant Chris Barrows ordered general quarters and evaded the PB-90's attempts to train its guns. Meanwhile, he radioed the British warship HMS Richmond for assistance and, in minutes, Richmond's Lynx helicopter arrived and aimed its rapid-fire 7.62 minigun into the PB-90's pilothouse windows. The PB-90 turned away and disengaged; however, if the Iraqi patrol boat had engaged, combat operations would likely have commenced several days earlier than planned.

In mid-March, local watercraft in the Khawr Abd Allah Waterway (KAA) attempted several breakouts. Coalition vessels had restricted passage of watercraft out of the waterway, thinking they might carry mines or escaping Iraqi officials. On March 17, a large breakout occurred with approximately sixty dhows attempting to evade Coalition units. With the dhows scattering in all directions, Wrangell, Adak and their small boats, aided by Boutwell's HH-65 and other Coalition RHIBs, managed to corral all of the dhows and board them. None of the dhows carried escaping Iraqi leaders and all had discharged any illegal cargoes typical of small smuggling vessels. After boarding teams had thoroughly searched the dhows, the patrol vessels allowed the watercraft to proceed along a specific route into the NAG.

In addition to MIO, the WPBs performed a variety of other missions in the shallow waters of the NAG. For example, in the evening of March 18, Adak used its radar and FLIR to shadow an Iraqi watercraft until 3:00 a.m. The boat met another small craft to complete the transfer of a defecting Iraqi naval officer to Coalition forces. While Adak and Wrangell operated

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near the mouth of the KAA, Baranof remained stationed to the east, off the mouth of the Shat al Arab (SAA) Waterway, near Iranian territorial waters. There, Baranof observed the movements of small Iranian naval units operating nearby and served as a guard ship outside of Iranian waters. Patrol duties in the heavily silted water of rivers and waterways of the NAG proved difficult because the WPBs on-board water purification systems would clog, making operations impossible beyond a few days.

During this same period, Coast Guard units and personnel also deployed to the Mediterranean in support of OIF. Based out of Charleston, South Carolina, WHEC Dallas deployed to the Mediterranean in early February and changed operational command to the U.S. Sixth Fleet. Dallas provided a much-needed escort for naval groups and MSC convoys transiting the Mediterranean from the Strait of Gibraltar to the eastern Mediterranean. By providing force protection to these vessels, Dallas freed up front-line warships to participate in combat operations. In addition, Dallas's HH-65 helicopter enabled the cutter to serve as a plane guard for Task Force 60's carrier forces during flight operations. The Coast Guard deployed its PATFORMED patrol boats in similar fashion to the PATFORSWA 110s. On March 16, WPBs Bainbridge Island, Grand Isle, Knight Island and Pea Island arrived at Augusta Bay, Sicily, after a one-month transit on board BBC Spain. It took a monumental effort by PATFORMED support staff to prepare for patrol boat operations in the Mediterranean because no Coast Guard infrastructure existed in the region and Coast Guard patrol boats had never served in that area before. The time required for logistical work reflected the dedication of the PATFORMED staff. Within five days of their arrival, the WPBs were fully operational and when Bainbridge Island suffered catastrophic failure of a main diesel engine, the PATFORMED staff replaced it in a record seven days.

Several other Coast Guard units had deployed overseas before the start of hostilities. LEDETs 406 and 205 had deployed to the Gulf on regular rotation prior to the initiation of hostilities. Each of the two LEDETs served on board the navy's Cyclone-class PCs, which incorporated additional berthing space for special operations teams and boarding teams. The LEDETs provided the navy PCs with boarding expertise and personnel legally sanctioned to board commercial vessels in peacetime operations. PACAREA had stood up the Major Cutter

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Support Detachment (MCSD) in Manama, Bahrain, to provide support for Walnut, Boutwell, and Boutwell's HH-65 helicopter. The team included a staff of ten and a van stocked with vital spare parts for the helicopter, the only HH-65 deployed with U.S. forces in the Arabian Gulf. The MCSD worked side-by-side with PATFORSWA personnel to assist and support the Coast Guard assets working out of Bahrain. The Coast Guard's National Strike Force sent thirteen personnel to the Gulf to join OIF's Military Environmental Response Operations (MERO), which also included team members from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) and the U.S. Navy's Supervisor of Salvage units. In light of acts of environmental warfare carried out by the Iraqis in the First Gulf War, MERO staff members received orders to work with Walnut and oil response equipment stored on board the amphibious dock landing ship USS Comstock and respond to the potential destruction of oil facilities in the Gulf.

Forty years after sending its patrol boats and personnel into combat operations in Vietnam, the Coast Guard would do so once again in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom. On March 19, by the time formal combat operations commenced, LANTAREA had deployed to the Mediterranean, the WHEC Dallas; WPBs Bainbridge Island, Grand Isle, Knight Island and Pea Island; and Port Security Unit 309. LANTAREA had sent to the Arabian Gulf the cutters Adak, Aquidneck, Baranof and Wrangell; and PACAREA sent WHEC Boutwell, WLB Walnut and the Port Security Units 311 and 313. In addition, Bahrain-based PATFORSWA supported the navy's two PCs Chinook and Firebolt and their respective LEDET teams.

Initial Coast Guard Combat Operations in OIF

At 8:00 p.m. in the evening of March 19, Coalition forces initiated Operation Iraqi Freedom combat operations with the launch of Tomahawk Land-Attack Missiles (TLAMs) against specific targets in Baghdad. Coalition naval units began operations early the next morning. An amphibious force composed largely of British Royal Marines would initiate an amphibious assault against Iraqi defenses on the Al Faw Peninsula, the location of a large number of Iraqi oil facilities. These landings would represent the largest amphibious operation of any kind carried out since the Korean War. Before these amphibious operations could begin, however, U.S. forces had to secure the Iraqi gas and oil platforms of KAAOT and MABOT, known collectively "GOPLATs."

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Coalition naval planners believed that the Iraqi oil terminals would prove strategically important to combat operations. Oil revenues would help fund reconstruction of the Iraqi state after the fall of Saddam Hussein's regime and the oil platforms posed the potential threats of environmental attack or as a base for enemy small-boat operations. The Iraqis garrisoned troops on the oil terminals, so the navy tasked its Sea, Air and Land (SEAL) forces with capturing the facilities. On the evening of March 20, the SEALs deployed from small boats and, supported by Polish Special Forces personnel, stormed the terminals. The Iraqi military personnel on board the GOPLATs did not resist the Special Forces operations and the SEALs rounded up the Iraqi prisoners on each terminal and searched for weapons and explosives before turning over the facilities to a U.S. Marine security detail. During the operation, Coast Guard WPBs maintained security around the terminals to prevent reinforcement or escape by Iraqi forces. Adak and Baranof maintained their vigil 1,000 yards from MABOT while Wrangell stationed itself 1,000 yards off of KAAOT.

The mission to capture the GOPLATs had been planned well in advance. After the SEALs and marines captured the terminals and cleared them of Iraqis, explosives and weapons, personnel from PSUs 311 and 313 arrived to take control of the facilities. While the typical mission of the PSUs had been to secure port facilities, which they carried out in Kuwait, NCWG One chose to use port security personnel to hold the oil terminals as well, thereby freeing up SEALs and marine units for further combat operations. The port security units boarded eight twenty-five foot security boats and set out from KNB only an hour after the SEAL assault force. During the passage, the PSU boats met the U.S. Army's large landing craft Mechanicsville and formed up in close formation near it to complete their transit to the oil facilities. Mechanicsville stopped first at KAAOT to deploy members of PSU 311 and its boats and to on-load its complement of Iraqi prisoners. Next, the landing craft proceeded to MABOT to deploy PSU 313 assets and personnel and to deposit the KAAOT prisoners.

Members of PSU 313 kept busy that evening. They served as security for MABOT and stood watch over the forty-one KAAOT and MABOT Iraqi prisoners held on board the terminal while Naval Intelligence personnel interrogated the Iraqis. During the questioning, interrogators

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learned that the Iraqi military had taken over the terminals ten days before hostilities began and that Iraqi military officials had ordered the Iraqi personnel to destroy the facilities with explosives if Coalition forces approached them. Before hostilities began, the Iraqi soldiers on the terminals had decided not to destroy the platforms and stacked the explosives in a location easily identified by Coalition forces. The Iraqis on MABOT proved so eager to surrender that they had decided to approach Coalition vessels by small boat if Coalition units failed to appear early in the shooting war.

After Coalition forces captured the oil terminals, naval forces initiated the amphibious assault of the Al Faw Peninsula. Meanwhile, during the evening of March 20, Coalition naval and air forces commenced softening up Iraqi defenses on the Al Faw Peninsula. In addition, under cover of darkness, American Special Forces units captured key targets while various attack aircraft, AC-130 flying gunships, and Coalition artillery targeted Iraqi defenses. In the early morning hours of March 21, British Royal Marines, supported by U.S. Navy and Royal Navy hovercraft, commenced the landings on Al Faw. As the amphibious units crossed the KAA, Adak and Chinook served as guard ships on the left flank, preventing Iraqi vessels from coming down the waterway and interfering with landing operations. In fact, of the 146 Coalition naval units in the NAG, Adak stationed itself deepest in enemy territory and served as the “tip of the spear” for Coalition naval forces.

During its early morning patrol on March 21, Adak and navy patrol craft Chinook surprised and stopped two down-bound Iraqi tugboats, including one towing a barge, and ordered them to anchor. At first, the Iraqi vessels raised no suspicions for they ordinarily serviced tankers and smaller watercraft that plied local waters. But the two patrol craft continued guarding the tugs and a special boarding team composed of Australian and American explosives experts searched the tugs and barge and found concealed within them a total of seventy contact and acoustic mines. If the Iraqis had released the mines, they could have sunk or heavily damaged many of the Coalition naval vessels operating in the NAG. The team secured the tugs and Chinook transported the Iraqi crews back to a Coalition naval vessel for processing. The captain of one of the mine-laying tugs admitted that the sight of the “white patrol boat” had prevented him from deploying his deadly cargo.

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Throughout March 21, the captain and crew of Adak experienced a great deal of excitement. At 06:00, Australian and British frigates began naval fire support operations in what observers later called “Five-Inch Friday.” The warships poured nearly 200 rounds of four-and-a-half-and five-inch shells into Iraqi defenses on the Al Faw Peninsula while Adak screened the Coalition vessels to ensure that only friendly watercraft approached. During this time, Adak’s crew felt buffeting from the explosions of hundreds of bombs and shells lobbed on shore. British Royal Marines, supported by U.S. Navy and Royal Navy hovercraft, commenced the amphibious assault on the Al Faw Peninsula; the largest amphibious operation carried out since the Korean War.

During the landings, an Iraqi PB-90 patrol boat had been cruising upstream on the KAA Waterway and positioned itself where it could threaten Coalition helicopters and provide early warning reports to Iraqi forces on the Al Faw Peninsula. To engage the PB-90, the Coalition command center vectored in an AC-130 gunship, which destroyed the Iraqi vessel. Afterward, a Coalition helicopter spotted three surviving crewmembers floating down the KAA and notified Adak of their location. The WPB recovered the three hypothermic Iraqis at 8:30 a.m. and transferred the prisoners to an Australian naval vessel for processing. Coalition experts later identified the men as warrant officers from Iraq’s Republican Guard.

Search and rescue has historically been one of the primary missions of the Coast Guard and this rule proved true for OIF. During the evening of March 21, members of Aquidneck’s crew observed as Coalition warships launched TLAMs toward Baghdad. The next morning, a lookout on Aquidneck spotted a British Royal Navy Sea King helicopter approach while another Sea King vectored in from the opposite direction. To the amazement of the crew, the two helicopters collided in mid-air and exploded on impact. Aquidneck reacted immediately and appeared at the site of the disaster before any other Coalition vessel. As jet fuel burned on the water’s surface surrounding the wreckage, Aquidneck launched its small boat and commenced search operations. Other Coalition vessels arrived to assist, including Walnut; however, all seven helicopter crew members, including an American navy officer, died in the crash.

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While military operations continued in the NAG, PATFORSWA staff in Bahrain had their own concerns. During initial combat operations, local protests and demonstrations targeted the U.S. and British embassies as well as NSA. PATFORSWA's force protection condition reached its highest level and Coast Guard personnel were allowed to visit only the PATFORSWA compound, NSA or the Seef Residence. Later, local authorities apprehended Sunni extremists with a cache of weapons and a target list of bars and clubs frequented by Americans. One Iraqi agent set off a bomb near NSA, escalating local Coalition forces to the highest level of chemical weapons preparedness. As a precaution, the command denied the cutters port visits and raised force protection at the PATFORSWA compound to full weapons posture.

In the Mediterranean, Coast Guard operations supported naval and Military Sealift Command operations in the region. Dallas began Mediterranean operations as an escort for high-value Military Sealift Command vessels and navy battle groups supporting the opening of the northern front in Iraq through Turkey. During combat operations in the Gulf, PATFORMED patrol boats logged nearly 1,500 nautical miles while supporting naval operations in the Mediterranean. The WPBs' primary mission had been to escort navy supply vessels and Military Sealift Command ships out of Souda Bay, Crete, the eastern Mediterranean's logistics port for American and NATO forces. The naval command cancelled this mission when Turkey would not support the use of its territory for supplying a northern front in Iraq. The four cutters and Dallas then came under the operational command of the navy's Task Force 60 for Leadership Interdiction Operations (LIO) in the eastern Mediterranean. This mission required the cutters to cut off a waterborne escape route for Iraqi leaders fleeing through Syria and into the Mediterranean. Syria, however, agreed to seal its borders, cutting off the escape route through its territory to the Mediterranean coast. Shortly after Syria closed its borders, the Sixth Fleet released Dallas and the PATFORMED cutters from operations in the Mediterranean.

As with its sister-ship Dallas, Boutwell's role also changed over the course of combat operations. Before hostilities had begun, Boutwell served as a lead ship for maritime interdiction operations. However, after hostilities started, the high-endurance cutter assumed responsibility for maintaining security around the oil terminals. Boutwell maneuvered back and forth between

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the facilities to keep close watch on each terminal. On one morning, the cutter's chemical detectors sensed the VX nerve agent and activated the cutter's chemical alarm. Boutwell's crew donned CBR masks and protective gear; but it proved to be a false alarm. The detectors had reacted to vapor from a glass cleaner used in the pilothouse to clean the windows.

Aided by its HH-65 and small boats, Boutwell also became a logistical hub for Coast Guard operations in the NAG. The WHEC provided the smaller patrol vessels with food and fuel and crews from the WPBs could do laundry and get a greater variety of cooked meals on board Boutwell. Navy helicopters would deliver mail, supplies and spare parts to the high-endurance cutter and then Boutwell's small boats distributed these materials to other Coast Guard cutters. The HH-65 handled other missions for the large cutter, including logistics, patrol duty, medical evacuations and shuttling passengers between various Coalition vessels. The helicopter's FLIR system also allowed it to perform night-time surface search operations. By the end of combat operations, Boutwell's HH-65 had flown as far north as Umm Qasr and Basrah and it had performed twelve different search and rescue missions.

Port Security Unit Operations in the NAG

In addition to the cutters, the port security units kept very busy. PSU 309 had spent the month of March in Italy waiting for the start of naval operations in support of Iraq's northern front. Personnel lined up logistics and command and control functions and prepared for operations in other parts of the Mediterranean. PSU 309 provided force protection for the PATFORMED WPBs and U.S. Navy supply ships docked at Augusta Bay, Sicily, and most unit members received four to five hours of training per day. Early in April, the command staff received word that PSU 309 would be released and speculation grew that the unit would be rotated back home.

Back at GOPLATs, members of PSUs 311 and 313 tried to settle in to life on board the oil terminals. The PSU complement for each oil platform represented only half of each unit's personnel since half of PSU 311 and half of PSU 313 remained in Kuwait guarding their respective port facilities. On KAAOT, PSU 311 received a visit from an Iranian boat, which approached the terminal and video-taped its Coast Guard inhabitants. PSU personnel on both

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terminals found the living quarters filthy and rat-infested, so crew members set up temporary shelters away from the terminal's sleeping quarters. During this time, Walnut proved very useful in supporting the PSU personnel on board the GOPLATs by unloading supplies with its 40,000-pound capacity buoy crane. Over time, living conditions improved as PSU personnel sanitized the living quarters and brought on-line the broken facilities.

Before PSU personnel stationed on the GOPLATs established a routine, severe storms rocked the oil terminals. On March 22, just a day after the PSUs arrived on board the facility, a severe storm struck with high seas and gale force winds. At MABOT, a navy landing craft suffered damage, after the storm swept it under the oil terminal, and MABOT's causeway broke off with the loss of supplies temporarily stacked on it. Moored to MABOT, PSU 313's twenty-five-foot small boats began to suffer storm damage, so the boat crews got underway. After navigating the treacherous seas for hours, the exhausted crews realized that their boats had run low on fuel and called for assistance. Cutters Boutwell and Walnut came to their assistance and returned them safely to MABOT. Walnut also retrieved MABOT's drifting oil terminal causeway and towed it to KNB. A second major storm hit the NAG a few days later, but it caused less damage to the GOPLATs than the first.

Early in the hostilities, Coalition forces secured Iraqi port facilities to allow for the shipment of humanitarian aid. By March 23, units of the U.S. Marine Corps and British military forces had secured the port facilities at Umm Qasr. NCWG One re-assigned PSU 311 from its original mission to guard KNB and tasked it with providing port security at the Iraqi port of Umm Qasr. Meanwhile, personnel from both PSU 311 and PSU 313 back-filled port security needs of the commercial port at Ash Shuaybah, Kuwait. PSU 311 personnel not already deployed to the oil terminals and Ash Shuaybah prepared for departure from the Kuwaiti Naval Base.

PSU 311 led the way for Coast Guard land-based personnel into Iraqi territory. On March 24, its personnel departed for Umm Qasr towing four trailered twenty-five foot port security boats. The PSU's convoy proceeded north up the main highway past Kuwait City, Kuwaiti tanks and fortified positions before reaching the United Nations demilitarized zone. The convoy passed through the final border fence, entered the outskirts of Umm Qasr and headed through the city

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toward the port. As soon as the convoy reached the port facility, members of the unit readied the boats for launch, unloaded the vehicles and prepared for operations. While Coalition forces had secured the port earlier, snipers occasionally harassed military operations and, late in the first day, a rocket propelled grenade landed near the PSU's compound. By the end of that day, PSU staff realized that they had become the first Coast Guard personnel to establish a base of operations on Iraqi soil.

Within very little time, PSU 311's daily activities developed into a routine. Personnel moved into air-conditioned tents and installed field showers with solar-heated water bags. A British port operations unit took over control of the port and erected a large galley and dining area. NCWG One units set up sensor positions around the port complex and brought with them an in-shore boat unit. PSU 311 and the NCWG units would remain in Umm Qasr until late May, when Spanish units took control of port security.

Securing Iraqi Waters for Vessel Traffic

After Coalition forces wrapped up the initial phases of naval combat operations, naval strategists focused on opening the KAA Waterway to vessel traffic. Wrecks from the Iran-Iraq War and Operation Desert Storm still littered the waterway and its shores, but mines proved a still greater concern. Some mines still remained fixed on the waterway's bottom from Desert Storm and it appeared that the captured mine-laying tugs had released between five and ten mines before their capture by Adak and Chinook.

Crews on the patrol vessels had experienced a number of sleepless days on the KAA during hostilities, but there was no time for rest as mine clearing operations commenced soon after the shooting war. On March 22, Minesweeping operations got underway with navy Sea Dragon mine countermeasure helicopters towing minesweeping sleds along the waterway. Next, patrol boats Wrangell and Adak, along with PCs Chinook and Firebolt, escorted U.S. Navy minesweepers and mine-hunting ships and British mine countermeasures vessels up the waterway. The process proved very slow as the minesweepers proceeded up the forty-mile channel to Umm Qasr at a rate of about three knots. The patrol vessels stood off 1,000 yards from the minesweepers, but they often had to station themselves upriver and on several

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occasions, minesweepers located mines in waters navigated earlier by the cutters and patrol craft. The crew of Adak heard their cutter contact a mine but it did not detonate and crew members from another patrol boat saw the mine surface briefly in Adak's wake. The navy also found several mines in the waters of the Iraqi port city of Umm Qasr, where they employed specially-trained dolphins for mine detection.

With minesweeping completed on the KAA, Coalition forces secured the two necessary ingredients for shipping safely into Iraq. It had taken about a week to complete mine-clearing operations on the KAA and with Umm Qasr under Coalition control, cargo vessels could begin steaming into the port facilities. Coalition forces elected to send the first shipload of humanitarian aid to Umm Qasr on board the shallow draft Royal Fleet Auxiliary vessel Sir Galahad. The same severe storms that had rocked the oil terminals delayed passage of the aid shipment, but by March 28, weather conditions cleared sufficiently for Galahad's trip up the KAA Waterway. With a mine-clearing vessel to guide it and navy PC Firebolt providing security, the RFA vessel began its passage up the KAA to Umm Qasr. Wrangell met the small fleet while down-bound on a routine patrol of the waterway and turned around to take the lead position and guide the way for the first shipment of humanitarian aid to the Iraqi people.

Securing the KAA Waterway for regular commercial traffic required not only minesweeping operations, but clearing of other obstacles as well. With wrecks and hulks of destroyed ships dotting the KAA's shoreline, patrol boat boarding parties and LEDETs on board the PCs cleared the shoreline of potential threats. A boarding team from Aquidneck discovered military supplies within the hulk of a tanker, including Iraqi military uniforms, money, weapons, fresh food and pictures of Coalition naval vessels. On April 7, members of LEDET 205 deployed from Chinook, located and then secured a large weapons cache stored in a coastal cave. Weapons found in the cache included grenades, rocket launchers, missiles, gas masks, small arms and ammunition. LEDET 205 also found and secured a suicide boat similar to the one used in the terrorist attack against the USS Cole. The Iraqi version carried more explosives than the Cole boat and created a crater twenty feet deep when detonated. The WPBs also served as escorts in April, when navy salvage vessels Catawba and Grapple removed further obstructions.

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Once navy and Coast Guard forces cleared the KAA Waterway of all hazards and the port of Umm Qasr resumed normal operations, shipping activities could return to a routine. Military vessels carrying humanitarian aid steamed up the waterway regularly and insurance rates dropped for commercial vessels intending to navigate the KAA. Having met the basic conditions necessary for commercial vessel traffic, the first commercially transported humanitarian aid made its way up the KAA on April 11. With Wrangell and PC Firebolt as escorts, the Motor Vessel Manar cruised up the KAA with 700 tons of Red Crescent Society supplied aid of food, water, first aid supplies and transport vehicles.

Securing and stabilizing the KAA Waterway also allowed the Coast Guard to provide much-needed assistance in the form of aids to navigation (ATON) support. Walnut had been deployed to the Gulf to defend against environmental warfare in the form of oil spills; however, the buoy tender's primary capability allowed the Coast Guard to restore the decrepit buoy system marking the channel along the KAA Waterway. Early in April, Walnut's crew began surveying the waterway's dilapidated Iraqi buoys beginning with an aerial assessment with Boutwell's HH-65. On April 3, personnel from Walnut boarded the WPB Baranof to survey the KAA's buoys from the water. Walnut's crew had previously heard rumors that a warehouse in Umm Qasr housed a full set of new buoys. During the Baranof trip, the Walnut survey party confirmed the rumor by stopping at Umm Qasr and locating the cache of unused buoys. By mid-April, Walnut had received orders from CENTCOM to rebuild the channel marking system and the buoy tender on-loaded supplies in Bahrain for repairing and replacing buoys along the KAA. On April 18, Walnut got underway from Bahrain to begin ATON operations along the waterway.

Aids-to-navigation work along the KAA Waterway proved far more dangerous than in Walnut's home waters of Hawaii and the Pacific. The current flowing down the KAA could reach a rate of around four knots or nearly five miles per hour. With the Arabian summer approaching, physical work already proved a very hot business and raising old buoys on deck brought with it the stench of accumulated marine growth and the thousands of flies it attracted. There also existed the threat of booby-trapped buoys or mines caught in a buoy's anchor chains and the threat level remained high, so Walnut's crew loaded their weapons and kept them ready during ATON work. Walnut's crew pulled each of the old buoys and replaced them with new

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ones equipped with lights, batteries and solar panels. Within a month, the buoy tender had replaced the old channel markers with brand new freshly painted buoys that could mark the channel day and night. On May 5, after a month's worth of ATON work Walnut placed its final buoy.

Post-Combat Redeployment

Naval combat operations concluded by the end of March, while organized resistance ceased in Baghdad by April 9. By mid-April, there followed a cessation of resistance in most other Iraqi cities. On May 1, President George Bush announced the end of combat operations in Iraq. Once the shooting war came to a close, every-day operations settled into a routine in the NAG. With the relative calm came increased activity by local fishermen and smuggling activities resumed. This meant that members of the fallen Iraqi regime could still attempt an escape by small boat or dhow. The patrol boats and navy PCs averaged as many as ten boardings per day during this period when daytime temperatures reached 120 degrees Fahrenheit with heat indexes nearing 150 degrees.

As major combat operations ceased, Coast Guard forces that had served prior to and during hostilities began to rotate back to the United States. By late-April, the navy command in the Mediterranean released Dallas and the PATFORMED WPBs from duty, allowing them to return home, and LANTAREA dis-established the PAFORMED detachment. On May 14, the five cutters began the return trip; however, this time the smaller cutters followed Dallas across the Atlantic rather than riding on board an MSC vessel. The 5,000-mile voyage set a record as the longest transit ever completed by a 110-foot cutter. The PATFORMED fleet had performed its escort and MIO mission admirably. Moreover, the WPBs in the Mediterranean and the Arabian Gulf had set records for hours of operation with some of them deploying for over thirty days of operation.

PACAREA units and personnel also redeployed back to the United States. Walnut departed the Gulf in mid-May for a forty-five day voyage back to Hawaii. High-endurance cutter Boutwell took the long way back to PACAREA through the Red Sea, transiting the Suez Canal and making port calls in the Mediterranean. It continued on through the Caribbean and Panama

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Canal and returned to San Francisco on July 14. In mid-April, PSU 309 personnel flew from the Mediterranean and arrived at KNB to relieve PSU 313. PSUs 311 and 313 completed their missions on the GOPLATs by early June, so PSU 313 re-deployed home on June 15. With Boutwell and Walnut heading home, PACAREA disestablished the Major Cutter Support Detachment and the MCSD's personnel returned home.

Summer saw the turnover of still more Coast Guard personnel and units. After a very successful mission of supplying and supporting the patrol vessels, July witnessed the turnover of the entire PATFORSWA support crew and the change of command for officers in three out of the four WPBs. The enlisted crews on board the patrol boats had as much as two-thirds of their complement rotated back home. In August, Gulfport, Mississippi's PSU 308 arrived to relieve PSU 309 and assume duties at Ash Shuaybah. In September, the first members of the Coast Guard's Redeployment Assistance Inspection Detachment (RAID) Team arrived in Kuwait to inspect containers and rolling stock, such as tanks and trucks, to ensure their safe loading for transit to the United States. The future would see further RAID Team assistance and the addition of WPBs Monomoy and Mauji to the PATFORSWA fleet for a total number of six 110s in the Arabian Gulf.

Epilogue

Nearly a year after President Bush announced the end of combat operations, the service suffered its greatest loss of Operation Iraqi Freedom. On April 24, 2004, terrorists navigated three small watercraft armed with high explosives toward the GOPLATs in an attempt to sabotage the facilities. Two of the watercraft proceeded to MABOT (at this time also known as the al Basra Oil Terminal) and detonated them after post-Saddam Iraqi security forces opened fire from the terminal. Shortly before this attack, PC Firebolt had intercepted a suspicious dhow and members of LEDET 403 and navy sailors proceeded toward the suspicious vessel in a RHIB. Terrorists on board the dhow detonated its explosive cargo as the RHIB approached, overturning the boat and killing DC3 Nathan Bruckenthal as well as two of the sailors. Wrangell appeared on the scene as soon as it heard of the attack. Serving his second tour of duty in Iraq, Bruckenthal had already received the Armed Forces Expeditionary Medal and Combat Action Ribbon. He posthumously received the Bronze Star, Purple Heart and Global War on Terrorism

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Expeditionary medal for service in his second tour of duty. He was the first Coast Guardsman killed in combat since the Vietnam War and he received full military honors at funeral services at Arlington National Cemetery.

The failed April 2004 attack on the GOPLATs changed the nature and tempo of Coast Guard maritime interdiction operations. The incident brought added caution to boarding operations since all local watercraft had the potential to carry explosives. By May 2004, MIO operations had been reviewed to improve standards and safety of boarding and interception methods. The regional commander also tightened maritime exclusionary zones surrounding the GOPLATs and patrol boats took a much more aggressive pre-emptive posture in enforcing those exclusionary zones.

Conclusion

During OIF, the Coast Guard performed many vital functions, including in-shore patrol, maritime interdiction, and port security. The PSUs performed their port security duties efficiently despite the fact that their units served in three separate port facilities and two oil terminals. The WPBs operated for many hours without maintenance in waters too shallow for any major navy assets and served as the fleet's workhorses in boarding, escort and force protection duties. PATFORSWA performed its support mission effectively even though it was the Coast Guard's first such support detachment. Walnut never did employ its oil spill capability, but it proved indispensable for MIO operations and ATON work on the KAA. Boutwell provided much-needed logistical support and MIO assistance with its boarding teams. In addition, the Dallas, PSU 309, and PATFORMED personnel and WPBs demonstrated that Coast Guard units could serve in areas lacking any form of Coast Guard infrastructure, such as the Mediterranean.

As in past Coast Guard combat missions, such as Vietnam, Coast Guard units and personnel in OIF exceeded all expectations in escort duty, force protection, maritime interdiction, and aids to navigation work. These kinds of operations represent some of the core missions of the Coast Guard over its long history. From the very outset of Middle East operations, the Coast Guard's training and experience in these and other maritime activities

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played an important part in OIF. In all of its operations, the Coast Guard conducted its missions with its usual efficiency and effectiveness.

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Chronology

2002

October-November USCG units alerted for possible deployment
November-January USCG units train and prepare for deployment

2003

January USCG units train and prepare for deployment
3 January WHEC Boutwell departs Alameda, California
15 January PATFORSWA preliminary team arrives in Bahrain
18 January WLB Walnut departs Honolulu, Hawaii
29 January PATFORSWA WPBs loaded on board M/V Industrial Challenger
6 February Boutwell joins Task Force 55 in Arabian Gulf
8 February PSU 311 and 313 recalled to active duty
8 February WHEC Dallas departs for Mediterranean
14 February PATFORSWA advance team arrives in Bahrain
16 February Boutwell begins MIO operations in the Arabian Gulf
20 February PSU 311 and 313 arrive in Kuwait (PSU 311 assigned to Kuwait Naval Base and PSU 313 assigned to commercial port of Ash Shuaybah, Kuwait)
22 February PATFORMED WPBs all loaded on board M/V BBC Spain
23 February WPB crews and PATFORSWA personnel arrive in Bahrain
25 February M/V BBC Spain departs for the Mediterranean
27 February Walnut arrives at Kuwait Naval Base
5 March PATFORSWA WPBs arrive in Bahrain
6 March PATFORSWA WPBs off-loaded from M/V Industrial Challenger
9 March PATFORSWA WPBs underway in Arabian Gulf
15 March Iraqi PB-90 nearly engages Wrangell in firefight
16 March M/V BBC Spain arrives in Italy
17 March Dhow breakout in the Northern Arabian Gulf
18 March PATFORMED WPBs off-loaded M/V BBC Spain in Italy
19 March Coalition forces launch Operation Iraqi Freedom at 8:00 p.m. in the evening
19 March PATFORMED WPBs off-loaded in Sicily, Italy
20 March Littoral combat operations commence in Iraq

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	Oil terminals (KAAOT and MABOT) captured
	PSU 311 and 313 personnel depart for oil terminals
21 March	WPB <u>Adak</u> captures first Iraqi maritime prisoners of war
	PSU 311 and 313 board the oil terminals
22 March	Severe storm in the NAG threatens Iraqi oil terminals
24 March	PSU 311 personnel deploy to Umm Qasr
28 March	First shipment of humanitarian aid arrives in Umm Qasr (shipped by RFA <u>Sir Galahad</u>)
3 April	<u>Walnut</u> 's initial ATON survey work on KAA Waterway
7 April	Weapons cache located by LEDET 205 on KAA Waterway
9 April	Organized resistance in Baghdad collapses
11 April	First commercial shipment of humanitarian aid arrives in Umm Qasr (delivered by M/V <u>Manar</u>)
15 April	PSU 309 arrives in Kuwait and deploys to KNB and Ash Shuaybah
1 May	President George Bush announces end of combat operations in Iraq
13 May	<u>Walnut</u> departs Kuwait Naval Base
13 May	<u>Boutwell</u> departs Bahrain
14 May	PATFORMED cutters depart Italy
11 June	PATFORMED cutters arrive in Norfolk, Virginia
12 June	PSU 311 and 313 depart GOPLATs
14 June	<u>Dallas</u> arrives in Charleston, South Carolina
15 June	PSU 311 returns to U.S. (PSU 313 and 309 remain through summer)
3 July	<u>Walnut</u> arrives in Honolulu, Hawaii
14 July	<u>Boutwell</u> arrives in Alameda, California
July-August	PATFORSWA cutter crews begin rotation back to the U.S.
July-August	PSU 308 relieves PSU 309
2004	
24 April	Attack of bomb-laden dhows and loss of DC3 Nathan Bruckenthal and two navy personnel

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Glossary

ARG	Amphibious Ready Group
AOR	Area of Responsibility
ATON	Aids to Navigation
CBR	Chemical, Biological and Radiological
CENTCOM	United States Central Command
CHOP	Change in Operational Command
DESRON 50	Destroyer Squadron 50
FLIR	Forward-Looking Infrared Receiver
GOPLAT	Gas and Oil Platform (in the Northern Arabian Gulf)
IBU	In-shore Boat Unit
ISC	Integrated Support Center
JCS	Joint Chiefs of Staff
KAA	Khawr Abd Allah Waterway
KAAOT	Khor al-Amaya Oil Terminal
KNB	Mohammad Al-Ahmad Kuwait Naval Base
LANTAREA	Atlantic Area Command, U.S. Coast Guard
LEDET	Coast Guard Law Enforcement Detachment
LIO	Leadership Interdiction Operations
MABOT	Mina al Bakr Oil Terminal (later known as al-Basra Oil Terminal)
MCSO	Major Cutter Support Detachment
MERO	Military Environmental Response Operations
MIO	Maritime Interdiction Operations
MSC	Military Sealift Command
MSU	Mobile Support Unit
NAG	Northern Arabian Gulf
NAVCENT	United States Naval Forces Central Command
NSF	National Strike Force
NGFS	Naval Gun Fire Support
NCWG	Naval Coastal Warfare Group
NOAA	National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
NSA	Naval Support Activity Bahrain
OIC	Officer in Charge
OIF	Operation Iraqi Freedom
PACAREA	Pacific Area Command, U.S. Coast Guard
PATFORMED	Patrol Forces, Mediterranean
PATFORSWA	Patrol Forces, Southwest Asia
PSU	Port Security Unit
RAID	Redeployment Assistance Inspection Detachment
RHIB	Rigid-Hull Inflatable Boat
SAA	Shat al Arab Waterway

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SAR	Search and Rescue Operations
SEAL	Sea, Air and Land Special Forces, U.S. Navy
TLAM	Tomahawk Land-Attack Missile
WHEC	High Endurance Cutter (378 foot), U.S. Coast Guard
WLB	225-foot sea-going buoy tender, U.S. Coast Guard
WPB	Patrol Boat (110 foot), U.S. Coast Guard

