



# Volume 3 Issue 1

## 1st Quarter 2020

# OPERATION COVID SHIELD



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# **Commandant's Address**

*Captain Elton Bennett*



## **My fellow Guardians,**

It has now been forty days and counting since we commenced our fight against Covid -19. The national effort under the Task Force has been charting the course for the Strategic Objectives that is established by the Oversight Committee and the office of the Chief of Defence Staff has been leading the joint effort under Operation Covid Shield. The Coast Guard has three operational objectives in Operation Covid Shield. First, securing our maritime borders, second enforce curfew laws and third maintain maritime operations. These three objectives are underpinned by our efforts to maintain the Coast Guard free of Covid 19. In this issue of the Watchstander we highlight just some of those operations that we have conducted in support of the national effort in the fight against Covid – 19.

Against the backdrop of the Coast Guard strategy, one measurement of effectiveness is our ability to maintain maritime operations beyond the scope of COVID SHIELD. During this 40 day operation we were able to launch a special operation using the Coast Guard Seals to deter a drug plane

from landing, we were able to recover a stolen Yacht from Caye Caulker, conduct a Search and Rescue for a fisher man off the Drown Caye area, and support the police for searching for firearms in the Rendevous Caye area. These are just some examples of our ability to sustain our broad scope of operations whilst supporting COVID SHIELD. Our strategy is working.!

There is however, negative impacts on our nation and organization. Belize, like every other state is impacted by the global pandemic. Our economy which is 65% based on tourism is severely affected. Ministries across the government are therefore asked to implement cost saving measures and the Ministry of National Security is no exception. The Coast Guard will not escape these very essential economic measures. Our emoluments will be affected, our material supply, maintenance and to a certain degree our operating cost will be affected. This however, will not alter this ship from its course. Our resilience as captured in my command philosophy will synchronize our efforts and we will overcome. The horizon is very promising and there are exciting projections in the very

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# Commandant's Address

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near future. For example our plans to revamp the Eduardono fleet has already commence, the outboard engines for our small boat fleet is also approved, and the propulsion system for the Special Purpose Law Enforcement Craft (safe boats) are expected in the next couple of months. Our support from the United State Southern Command remains strong, our partnership with the Mexican Navy continues to explore new opportunities whilst our newly established relationship with Taiwan is promising. The British Forces continues to pledge support even in this difficult time. Our defence engagement with all four partners are captured in this issue of the Watchstander.

The Wonder Woman Competition, and Cross Country Cycling Classic are two activities on our local calendar of events that are cancelled by Covid – 19. Regionally, Furezas Commando and Exercise Trade Winds are also cancelled. This does not mean that we will loose our robustness and skillset. Our new configuration causes us to focus on the individual. Your individual physical fitness during this time is very important.


Maintain your discipline to exercise. Develop new skills and hobbies: I highly recommend reading, gardening, and studying. Here is a link to a series of free courses being offered from Ivy league schools that you may find interesting.

<https://www.freecodecamp.org/news/ivy-league-free-online-courses-a0d7ae675869/>

I encourage you to capitalize on this free education opportunity.

I do hope that you find this Issue of the Watchstander informative. Whether you are overseas, at sea, on shore leave or Standing Watch this newsletter is published for your information. My intention is to keep our sailors, our families and our friends informed of our activities and engagements in a more casual way while highlighting some of our success.

Wash your hands, wear your mask, minimize your movements, adhere to the State of Emergency and remain *Utrinque Paratus*.

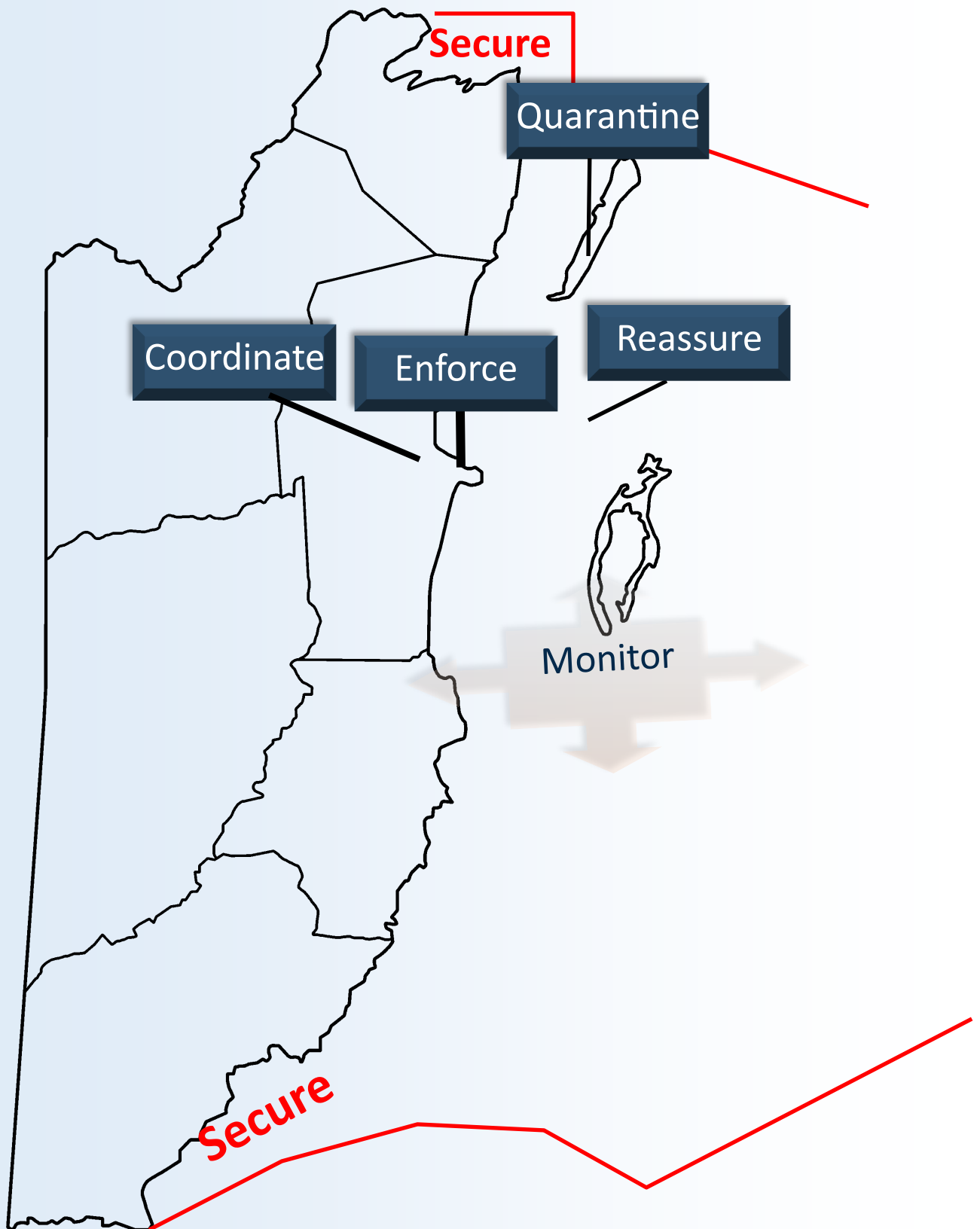
  
Captain Eileen Bennett  
Commandant



*Master Chief Petty Officer of the Coast Guard , MCPO Ariel Garrido delivering food to the operators on the front line in San Pedro*

# OPERATION COVID SHIELD

*The First 40 Days*



# OPERATION COVID SHIELD

## Operational Objective #1

### Securing Our Maritime Borders

This was one of the first Covid Task that was assigned. The closing of the ports of entry into the country required the Coast Guard reinforce patrols at the vulnerable sea routes that act as an alternate to entering Belize. Consejo and Sarteneja were tasked for this operation. In the South Sarstoon and Barranco were successful in detaining vessels crossing from Guatemala.

## Operational Objective #2

### Quarantine of Ambergris Caye

Our largest operation by scale and most significant during the response to Covid 19. The Coast Guard deployed over 60 personnel and employed eight vessels in the Quarantine of Ambergris Caye. This initial phase of Covid 19 was a necessary measure to demonstrate Governments approach in combating Covid 19.

## Operational Objective # 3

### Enforce State Of Emergency

The Coast Guard transition to a phase 3 of operations after the declaration of a national state of emergency. Our main deployments are in Belize City and Belize City Harbour.

## Operational Objective # 4

### Reassure

Caye Caulker has been one of those communities that the Coast Guard supports in times of Hurricane Response and Disaster Relief. Our deployment to Caye Caulker falls within that same scope of operation. Reassuring the residents of Caye Caulker is one of our key operational objective. This includes supporting the Village Council and the police department in Caye Caulker with additional law enforcement capability is much appreciated by the Caye Caulker residents. Reassurance operations are also conducted across all the communities that we embedded such as Sartenja, San Pedro, and Barranco.

# Quarantine Operation—Ambergris Caye

## *Lieutenant Commander Alma Pinelo*

**Pandemic. Global crisis. Possibly the biggest operation of our careers.**

All these thoughts ran through my mind as I watched the Prime Minister's Press Conference on March 23<sup>rd</sup> as the inevitable was announced, Belize's first confirmed case of COVID-19 in San Pedro, Ambergris Caye. Within a couple of hours, the Coast Guard transformed itself from regular operations to setting up an emergency operations center for what would be known as Operation

berthing space. We would hug San Pedro close and stop all traffic in or out.

Our presence was felt in the waters. Everyone was turned back or arrested for failure to comply with the SOE. The San Pedro Police Department was a phone call away. Together we kept persons off the streets and off the water. Combating this ghost threat, however, was never an easy one. A holistic approach prevails when resources are limited. In San Pedro, the Ministry of Health, NEMO, Police Department, Coast Guard and



COVID Shield.

The first 24 hours was crucial in order to be able to successfully lock down Ambergris Caye. The panic was palpable within the first hour after the PM's address. Hundreds of non-residents were attempting to vacate the island. A State of Emergency was called for Ambergris Caye for 72 hours. All sailing was prohibited. Within the first 6 hours, Station San Pedro had 3 BCG assets and 1 from the Belize Defence Force Special Boat Unit. At that moment, all boat crews split up into two in order for us to be able to maintain watch 24 hours of the day for however long our presence was required. Human resource was vital in order to carry out this operation to success. You could have ten boats but if you do not have the crew for them, our efforts would have been futile.

On Day 03, a second case on San Pedro was confirmed and the State of Emergency was extended to a month. All efforts were to accomplish one mission, Containment. We doubled in strength at Station San Pedro, from 31 to 73 men and women in blue and we had more boats than

San Pedro Town Council were hard at work every day.

As I briefed the troops, I could feel their energy, their excitement, and their willingness to protect the people of San Pedro. They understood the importance of our operation and what it meant on a national level. As their Fleet Commander, I ensured to keep them well fed, had the necessary tools to carry out their jobs, but most importantly to constantly remind them of the importance of their work especially when the enemy cannot be seen and is known to be deadly. We were the frontline on Ground Zero and they felt that deeply in their bones.

For me, it hit closer to home, as I call San Pedro home, as do my family and friends. I had a duty to Belize but also to them which made this operation that much more important to me.

Looking back and moving forward, there is much room for improvement but also many things we did right. Operation COVID Shield will be the one of biggest operations of all our careers for a long time and shield San Pedro we did





The United States Government donated over \$400,000 USD worth of communications equipment and Boston Whaler sustainment parts to the Ministry of National Security. The donation is part of the U.S. Southern Command's continued partnership with Belize and was funded by the U.S. counternarcotics program.





## Defence Engagement - Mexican Navy

### *A Trusted Partner*



Vice Admiral Eduardo Rojas Pineda

The Belize Coast Guard and the Mexican Navy shares a long-standing special relationship that is founded on mutual respect and shared interest. As a part

of his orientation as the new Coast Guard Commandant, Captain Bennett visited the 11th Naval Zone in Chetumal Mexico.

During the visit Captain Bennett had the opportunity to discuss some of the main threats facing Belize's northern border region in the Rio Hondo and adjacent Caribbean Sea. Narco-Trafficking, particularly by air, is currently the main concern for the Ministry of National Security.

Exchange of information and joint operations between the two services is essential in combating Narco-Trafficking. Traffickers take advantage of geographical gaps and exploit where there is a disconnect between



adjacent states. It is therefore important for both the Mexican Navy and the Belize Coast Guard to continue their efforts in the war against drugs

## Defence Engagement - Taiwan Navy

### *A New Partner*



His Excellency Remus Chen, Ambassador of Taiwan to Belize.

In 2019 the Defence Section of the Ministry of National Security embarked on a Defence Engagement quest with the Ministry of National Defence of Taiwan. The Ministry of National Security sought opportunities in training and acquisition of equipment for the Defence Forces of Belize.

In February of this year the Coast Guard had its first objective met. Officer Cadet Tyler Reyes was the recipient of a scholarship to attend the Naval Academy in Zuoying District, Kaohsiung, Taiwan. During his course of study he will undergo a combination of academic programs and military studies that will prepare him for professional military service in the Belize Coast Guard.

# Defence Engagement—British Army

## *Support to Belize Armed Forces*



Our partnership with the British Forces is a unique one. Despite not having a Defence Attache resident in Belize, the British Army Training Support Unit Belize (BATSUB) plays a key role in Defence Engagement. Despite having forecasted training activities cancelled due to Covid –19, BATSUB was able to fill a critical gap that existed in our logistics— Field Rations. During our nation wide operation BATSUB donated three hundred 24hrs ration packs to the Belize Coast Guard. This enables us to deploy patrols in areas where we are logistically challenged. In addition, the Commanding Officer of BATSUB Simon Nichols pledge other logistics support if required. Helicopter flight time, troop carrying vehicles and barrack accommodation are just some of the support that BATSUB has pledge to support our armed forces.

## The Global Leadership Summit Donates N-95 Mask

### *Support to Belize Armed Forces*



The Chairman of the Global Leadership Summit Belize, Mr Kerm Thimbriel, handed over an adequate supply of N-95 mask to the Belize Coast Guard for its fight against Covid-19. These mask which are difficult to obtain will be set aside for the Coast Guard medics to perform front line services.



# 2nd Place La Ruta Maya River Challenge

## *Lieutenant Armando Cobb*

Once more the BCG participated in the Annual La Ruta Maya Belize River challenge under the theme UNITY, with the participation of our male team as COAST GUARD UNITY 1 and mix team as COAST GUARD UNITY 2. Every Step of the process, from the preparation phase to the execution phase was based on our theme of UNITY. The selection of the paddlers for

our teams. This request was based on the theme of UNITY with our NGOs and was quickly embraced by Turneffe Atoll Sustainability Association, Southern Environmental Association and Wildlife Conservation Society. In the main event the Coast Guard teams entered as the underdogs in their categories. For the 4 days, the officer presence of both teams was felt in the river as the cheers for the Unity teams got



this year was crucial to the success of our teams. The Daniel Brothers was a perfect combination of strength and experience. The Heart of a lion of Daniel Gregorio to never quit was ideal to be the power house in the middle of the canoe for the Coast Guard Unity 1 team. In the Mix Team, the experience and leadership of Petty Officer Franzua in the bow, the determination to uphold the Guydis family name high was the drive for Avis Guydis in the stern, the strength and reach of Hemmans was ideal to strengthen the middle in the mix team. All these special characteristics combined together in three month of rigorous 6 hours daily paddling sessions ensured to unite the teams in strength, mind and soul. Additionally, this year we engaged our Non-Governmental Organizations that support the BCG in our ongoing efforts to safeguard Belize's Marine Resources to sponsor

louder and louder every day. The organization name was finally being sound of in every radio station, sponsor and fan talk along the river bank like the BCG ethos in muster parade. On the final leg, the Belize Coast Guard Unity 1 team crossed the finish line in second place and securing the overall second place with a total time of 18 hours 17 minutes and 8 seconds beating Team NICH and WESTRAC. Coast Guard Unity 2 earned the 4<sup>th</sup> place in the Mix Category.

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# Career Spotlight

## *Lieutenant Junior Grade Shawdi Reyes*

In this Issue of the Watch stander Newsletter we feature Lieutenant Junior Grade Shawdi Reyes. She is currently posted as the Coast Guard Adjutant. After 5 years of service in the Coast Guard she has achieved significant milestones in her career development and has contributed to a broad array of Coast Guard activities. This very balanced career of physical activities, education, training and operations is surely giving her the foundation for a promising career.

### **Give us a career background of where you came from after joining the service to your current posting as the Adjutant**

I Joined the Belize Coast guard in 2014 at age 20. Upon graduating from recruit training, I was sent to the Engineering department where I spent two years. I sat the Officer Selection Board and was successful and thereafter; I was sent to Officer Candidate School in New London Connecticut. I graduated from OCS in 2017 and was commissioned as an Ensign into the Belize Coast Guard. Upon returning I was posted to fleet where I became a platoon commander and my first deployments were all in San Pedro and thereafter, Calabash. While on my patrol commander tour of duty I was nominated me to attend the Patrol Craft Officer Course (PCOC) of which I am the only female that has done it so far. Patrol Commander Officer Coastal is a course that teaches a person how to drive a boat to some extent in the operational level as many movements and skills are taught in order to enhance the coxswain skills. I took this course on the first year as a platoon commander. On the second year as a platoon commander, I did a course in Mexico at Baha California. This course was an Infantry course that was conducted by the US Marines and taught by "La Marina de Mexico". The course was very physically demanding because it encompassed long days and nights of land navigation, combat shooting, land patrolling and early morning of physical trainings. After



Completing the course, I returned to Belize where I continued my tour of sea duties.

### **You have accomplished a broad range of activities in the Coast Guard. Tell us about your experiences in the various Coast Guard activities:**

**Wonder Woman Competition:** Wonder Woman is a competition that requires not only for the participant to be physically ready but mentally prepared. Physically ready to get through it and mentally prepared to not give up because the pain that one bears sometimes makes us want to stop but we have to keep telling ourselves to not give up. Wonder woman is a very tough competition but overall, it challenges every female that takes part in it to be and do better.

**Baker to Vegas Challenge:** I remember being all excited about this competition but I had no clue what it was all about until I started to train for it. We ran approximately 12 miles every day at Marion Jones which was tough at the beginning but eventually it got easier. The day of the competition my adrenaline was high and I was so nervous, I ran stage 16, 5.8 miles. The most challenging part of this was the climate but overall, I did good and the team did good. Our Category was Mixed team and we came in first place in our category and 6<sup>th</sup> overall from about 253 teams.

**La Ruta Maya River Challenge:** For this Competition we trained about 3 months prior to the competition which took a lot of fortitude and strength as the it was a 4-day challenge. On the day of the competition it was quite challenging as on

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# Career Spotlight

## *Lieutenant Junior Grade Shawdi Reyes*

the first day my hands got blistered and our entire bodies are hurting but we have to keep pushing on the second, third and fourth day. By the fourth day all those blisters turn hard and part of your hand and they no longer hurt. For La Ruta Maya I paddled with a female team and we came in third place in our category.

**The Selection for a Platoon Commander for Recruit Training is a thorough process. That appointment requires someone who is mature, capable and competent to transform civilians into military personnel. You once held that position, tell us about that experience.**

Being a platoon commander for Recruit Training was a great experience as it allowed me to not only be a platoon commander and discipline recruits if they were doing wrong but also to be a mentor for many especially for those that wanted to leave recruit training just because they considered the training to be hard. It allowed me to see recruits on another stand point because I was a recruit once and I did not fully understand why as recruits we went through certain things until I saw the reason behind it. It also allowed me to become a better mentor for females and understand their queries and concerns but to be firm in order to mold them as responsible individuals.

**You are currently enrolled in a program to obtain a Bachelors Degree in Criminal Justice. What are some of the challenges that you face with balancing school and work.**

I am currently enrolled at Galen University Program in order to obtain a Batchelor Degree in Criminal Justice and some of the challenges that I face with balancing school and work are that sometimes I have to look at which one is more urgent and work on it. Sometimes, I have to stay back at work because my class schedule won't allow me to reach home and take the class.

Another challenge is that school work and work itself can get overwhelming if I don't have a schedule therefore, I live on a schedule. Even so, all this is just a part of a longer investment which will not only allow me to get a Batchelor degree but also to be more productive for the Organization.



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# 1st Place Valentine Cycling Tour

*Seaman Apprentice Nashen Ysaguirre*



# 2nd Place Krem New Years Cycling Classic

*Petty Officer 3rd Class Joslyn Chaverria*





# Belize Coast Guard Selects



**HONDA**  
**MARINE**

Bennys Enterprises won the contract to supply outboard engines to the Belize Coast Guard for the revamping of its Eduardono Class of vessels . The selection was based on **engine performance** and **supply chain management**. Through its BenQuip subsidiary, Bennys will provide ten 250 HP engines in the first phase of the program followed by another ten 115hp outboard engines for the small boat fleet.

With its powerful 3.5 liter V-6 single overhead cam (SOHC) engine, Honda Marine's BF225 offers superior outboard technology to sports anglers and recreational boaters alike. Based on Honda's world-renowned Odyssey engine and featuring a Honda Exclusive Dual Stage Induction system, the BF225 delivers superior power and fuel economy throughout its rpm range. With today's boater relying heavily on VHF radios, depth gauges and other electronics, the BF225's belt-driven, on-demand alternator delivers up to 90 amps of peak charging power.



# The Overseas SITREP

## Heroica Escuela Naval Militar, Vera Cruz Mexico



Name: Officer Cadet Emerson Garrido

Course: Naval System Engineering

Graduation: June 2021

Name: Officer Cadet Ruby Jimenez

Course: Logistics

Graduation: June 2020

Name: Officer Cadet Marlon Aguilar

Course: Hydrography

Graduation: June 2020

# We Will Remember Them

**In the line of Duty.** The two pilots and two aircrew of our sister forces in the BDF Air Wing died in an air accident on the 27th February 2020 during a major counter narcotics operation. The Air Wing has had a long standing relationship with the Belize Coast Guard since its inauguration in 2005. Search and Rescue operations has been our main area of collaboration. The Coast Guard salutes the fallen soldiers for their service to nation.



Cpl. Yassir Mendez | Major Radford Baizar | Major Adran Ramirez | Cpl. Reynaldo Choco



# VISION

create an apex institution highly professional, motivated, trained and resourced capable of enforcing maritime laws and projecting sea power to the limits of our sea spaces and support maritime operations locally and regionally



## STRATEGIC MISSION

protect Belize Maritime Spaces from threats, both foreign and domestic, by providing maritime security, safety and protection of our people, industries and natural resources through military, law enforcement and humanitarian