



# THE WATCHSTANDER

## Newsletter of the Belize Coast Guard

Volume 6 Issue 3

31 Dec 2024



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### 2024

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# The Coast Guard Vision

To 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.

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# State of the Coast Guard 2024

*Rear Admiral Elton Bennett*



This 19<sup>th</sup> Year of Coast Guard Service to the nation of Belize has been a remarkable one. One filled with accomplishments, and promising future initiatives, and I'm excited to share in summary some of those highlights and update you on our continued strengthening and improvements of your Belize Coast Guard.

I see a broad cross section of attendees here today from foreign military officers that represents our alliances, political leaders, policy makers, government agencies,

NGO's, partners and friends of the Belize Coast Guard who have all had some form of investment in this maritime service that we call the Belize Coast Guard. And it is my duty as the Commandant to report to you on the State of your Coast Guard Service.

This year, the Coast Guard expanded its operational reach in new dimensions, we went airborne with the launch of our Drone Squadron in August with the Perimeter 8 Unmanned Air System. This new operational dimension bridges a gap that existed in our capability now enabling your Belize Coast Guard to conduct areal surveillance in support of marine conservation efforts whilst simultaneously supporting every one of our twenty two other Coast Guard mission that we are legislated to execute. We are happy to report that since the launch of our Drone Squadron, with the support of the USCO we have qualified 6 of our pilots as trainers to ensure capacity building and to ensure that we develop the expertise that Belize needs in this increasingly expanding technology. Furthermore, thanks to our Mexican counterpart we were able to train three of our pilots in Mexico City in drone operations that is crucial in building our doctrine in this new capability that we are developing.

Even at nineteen years the Coast Guard must continue to seek new capabilities, new areas of development to meet the new challenges that we face in an ever increasingly evolving and complex security



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# Facing the Aftermath: 'Tropical Storm Sara'

*LT JG Mark Choc*

Tropical Storm Sara made landfall in the Belize City area on Sunday, November 17th, causing significant rainfall and thunderstorm. In response, the National Emergency Management Organization (NEMO) initiated a response and more importantly the deployment of Belize Coast Guard into natural disaster operation mode.

The Western areas, such as San Ignacio Town and Santa Elena Town were among the first affected, as rising water levels disrupted public services, including schools, the public market, and local traffic. The water then flowed from the Western areas into the Belize District, inundated the communities in the Belize River Valley area, displacing and disrupting communities. Farmers, particularly cattle ranchers, were severely affected, with many livestock killed by the flooding, resulting in significant economic damages. The flood also submerged several main roads leading from the several villages disrupting the daily lives of the residents.

The effect was evident in the village of Rancho Dolores, where the main road access to and from the village was covered with several feet of water disrupting the movement of residents, including students and employees. As the water flowed down stream, it began to accumulate in the Crooked Tree Lagoon, the primary water basin for the Belize River. The villagers of Crooked Tree Village began to experience the impacts of the flood on the 21st of November 2024, with rising water levels in the lagoon affecting the main road from the village.

The response to Tropical Storm Sara is strategic to challenge the operational plan of the Belize Coast Guard, including the Coast Guard Hurricane Plan, the National Maritime Search and Rescue Plan and more importantly, to review the resource and assets available to effective response when called upon.

The aftermath of tropical Storm Sara, triggered the Belize Coast Guard into enforcing its natural disaster

response plan, deploying a vessel along with a well-trained boat team of sailors to Rancho Dolores village, on the 20th of November, three days after land fall of Tropical Storm Sara.

Two days after, on the 22nd of November, a second team of Coast Guard operators were deployed to Crooked Tree village, in more flood operation.

The relentless efforts and hard work of the Coast Guard sailors ended on the 16th of December after the water level receded in Crooked tree, no longer posing a threat to the community. The operation in Rancho Dolores resulted in transporting total of one-hundred forty-two (142) residences. While Rancho Dolores flood operation lasted till the 25th of November, the efforts in Crooked Tree lasted over a period of three (3) weeks. The Belize Coast Guard were effectively employed in the transport of students, employees and other persons to maintain their daily lives in the impacted areas. This operation also drastically supported NEMO and Red Cross in ensuring the residents have access to relief supplies to recover from the impact of the flooding.

Operation limitations always present themselves, however the teamwork, perseverance of the Belize Coast Guard boat teams have enabled a successful operation in Crooked Tree and Rancho Dolores Village. The Belize Coast Guard will continue to prepare its human resources and assets for effective disaster response operation and will remain steadfast in its commitment in safeguarding the well-being of the people of the country.





# Retirement: Rear Admiral John Borland

*Chief of Defence Staff*



Belize's longest serving military officer, and the officer that has obtained the highest rank in the history of our military has now retired from active duty.

Rear Admiral Borland handed over command of the Belize Coast Guard in November 2019 to then Captain Elton Bennett and took up the appointment of Chief of Defence Staff at the Ministry of Defence, the first officer to be appointed to this post.

Rear Admiral John Borland was born on 9<sup>th</sup> March 1970 in the town of Punta Gorda, Toledo District. He enlisted into the Belize Defense Force Volunteer Battalion in 1987 and joined the regular Element in 1990. Being in the military came natural to him. His robust, fearless, and forceful personality was exactly what was needed in this line of work. He attended the Royal Military Academy Sandhurst to qualify as a commissioned officer. This was the pivotal point of his career which set the stage for his future development as a military officer. His years as a military officer were filled with a cross section of varying experiences which were not always pleasant. In the early years he faced several setbacks due to his aggressive style, tendency to challenge authority, and outspoken attitude which often bordered defiance. It perhaps took him too long to understand that this was not the desired standards of

always being diplomatically correct.

His military career encompassed a host of training courses both locally and overseas in places such as the UK, USA, Cyprus, France, Jamaica, Bahamas, Barbados, and Japan. During this time, he held various appointments such as Platoon leader, Training Subaltern, Company Commander, Intelligence Officer, Maritime Operations Officer, and Commanding Officer Maritime Wing. He rose to the rank of Major and was one of the most respected and dependable officers especially in time of risk or danger. Of his eighteen years in the Belize Defence Force, half was spent in the infantry and half in the Maritime Wing. This led to him being a maritime trained officer as well which helped to set the stage for his transformation to a Coast Guard Officer.

In November 2005, Commander Borland was appointed the Vice Commandant of the newly established Belize Coast Guard. Five months later he was enrolled in the World Maritime University in Sweden and graduated 18 months after with a Master's Degree in Maritime Affairs. He became the first Belizean to attend and graduate from this apex institution. During his master's program he gained invaluable knowledge training with maritime administrations in the UK, Germany, Norway, Finland, South Korea, and Japan. Captain Borland took command of the Coast Guard on 14<sup>th</sup> August 2009 as the Commandant, a commitment which he shouldered with eager anticipation.

In July 2011, Captain Borland became the first Belizean Officer to attend the Naval Command College in Newport, Rhode Island from which he graduated with honors in June 2012. This course at the prestigious and world-renowned Naval War College qualifies Captain Borland in the art of Naval Command and Warfare and indeed made him promotable to the rank of flag officer. Captain Borland was promoted to the rank of Rear Admiral Lower Half in the Belize Coast Guard on 30<sup>th</sup> November 2012.

He is married to Elia Gamero of Belmopan and together they have three lovely children Joel, Mia, and John.



# Sector South Headquarters is Operational

*LT Juan Bulum*



Belize Coast Guard Sector South Headquarters was inaugurated on 28<sup>th</sup> November 2024 at the Port Road Big Creek, Independence Village. This capital investment is a vision from the

Belize Coast Guard's "Beyond the Horizon Strategic Plan." Sector South Headquarters is a subordinate command to the Belize Coast Guard First Fleet, and it is designed to provide command, control, and logistical support to six operating bases in our southern region of the country. This base ensures efficiency and effectiveness regarding operational expansion and capabilities.

Station Big Creek is equipped to perform national security functions at the Port, such as maritime law enforcement, humanitarian operations, and joint interagency operations as required. The decentralized headquarters ensures that operations can be launched from Big Creek on a ten-minute notice to move and can continuously sustain these deployed units with service and support where needed. Reducing these long logistical lines translates into more operationally focused patrolling. The base eliminates the time gap that existed when all operations were launched at the BCG Headquarters resulting in better **service** to all mariners.

Furthermore, territorial integrity and naval defense of our southern border are key to our nation's political, military, economic, social, infrastructure & industrial (PMESII) operational environment. Sector South is focused on countering other illegal activities such as transnational organized crime, cross-border fishing, uncustomed goods, illegal migration, and port violations. This base will ensure that our operational

design will continue to focus on deterrence as our first layer of defense with forward-deployed units supported by predictive intelligence along our littorals. Maritime interception operations are our second layer of defense against the threat of these illicit activities and drug trafficking. Our ability to maneuver under the cover of darkness and the use of our assets is key to our success in our southern domain.

The assets of Sector South ensure that the sub-unit is self-sustained to achieve higher command objectives of sea control and territorial integrity. This base guarantees the free movement of people across our southern maritime spaces, the unimpeded flow of maritime commercial shipping, freedom of navigation for tourism and recreation vessels, and unhampered economic harvesting of marine resources. There are prominent coastal communities in the area of operation including, Placencia, Mango Creek, Monkey River, Punta Negra, Punta Gorda Town, and Barranco. Maritime tourism and recreational activities are second only to San Pedro and Caye Caulker. The shipping industry associated with the Port of Big Creek is increasing and container ships transiting the Victorian Channel are of national economic importance.

This base is also part of the initiative to support the Ministry of Blue Economy for the protection of our marine resources ranking on top of our list of priorities. Moreover, this base is strategically placed to support our southern non-governmental organizations that manage our marine reserves such as the Worldwide Conservation Society (WCS), Southern Environmental Association (SEA), and the Belize Environmental Development and Conservation Association (BECOA).



## Sector South Headquarters is Operational Cont.



approach and pooling of resources to mitigate a

common threat and issue at hand. Joint initiatives such as these have enabled Sector South to access the long-range cameras at the Sapodilla Caye Marine Reserve through TIDE. This capability will allow real time monitoring of this marine reserve at Big Creek for any possible illicit activities happening within the area of responsibility.

Finally, Sector South Headquarters will have the capacity to launch its air surveillance through the newly acquired Perimeter 8 drones. This Headquarters is important for the Belize Coast Guard's developmental strategy allowing better administration of its operations regarding its Mission for Maritime Security and Maritime Safety. The courage, commitment and respect of our sailors ensure Sector South remains *Utrinque Paratus!*





# Caribbean Nations Security Conference

*Port of Spain, Trinidad & Tobago*



Brigadier General Azriel Loria and Rear Admiral Elton Bennett represented Belize at CANSEC which is sponsored annually by SOUTHCOM in the region and was last hosted by Trinidad and Tobago in 2018.

The U.S. military has an enduring partnership with defense and security forces in the Caribbean.

U.S. and regional forces routinely train together in annual exercises, including Tradewinds, which is the region's premier multinational training exercise focused on Caribbean security.

U.S. military and Caribbean partners also collaborate in efforts to detect, disrupt, and dismantle transnational criminal organizations and traffickers, and collaborate on efforts to strengthen humanitarian assistance and disaster response capabilities in the region.

This year's conference theme was "Strengthening Bonds, Securing Futures: United for Regional Security". The event included discussions on countering threats across multiple domains, as well as enabling a regional approach to respond to natural disasters and crises.

During the conference, defense and security leaders

from the Caribbean exchanged ideas, experiences, and perspectives on regional collaborative efforts to address security challenges in the 21st century. Common threats and challenges were discussed such as cyber security, human rights, transnational organized crime and the security impacts of climate change.

During Bi-laterals the Belizean delegation met with the Commander of US Southern Command Admiral Holsey where they discussed specific challenges to Belize such as drug trafficking and natural disasters. The delegation also updated Admiral Holsey on the ICJ process.

Bi-laterals were also held with Guyana, Trinidad, Jamaica, UK, Perry Centre, and the InterAmerican Defence Board. The delegation reaffirmed Belize's commitment to regional security whilst seeking development opportunities for Belize's armed forces.

# State of the Coast Guard

*cont*

environment. In that regard let me transpose the stability and resilience pillar of our national security strategy that identifies climate change as a threat to our national security. This year, sailors from our Special Operations Group, and sailors from right here in Sector South deployed well inland, into the Toledo District to

proudly report, that the Coast Guard is strategically forward deployed on every Atoll, and within all 7 marine reserve, covering almost ever channel within the inner reef providing maritime governance to our sea spaces, and through officer presence, deterring drug trafficking from taking roots in our sea spaces.

**“It is therefore incumbent upon the Coast Guard to develop and maintain the capability to support our national emergency management organization.”**

fight wild fires that caused the worst environmental damage on record, negatively impacting livelihoods, agriculture and health of our people in the south. This is a classic example of the evolution of the contemporary security environment. Likewise, as I address you here today, Coast Guard men and women are deployed well inland in the Belize River Valley, in Rancho Dolores and Crooked Tree Village providing vessel transportation service for those affected by the floods caused by Tropical Storm Sara. We forecast that this operation will continue through the month of December. As a small coastal developing state Belize remains vulnerable to extreme weather systems. It is therefore incumbent upon the Coast Guard to develop and maintain the capability to support our national emergency management organization. The advent of these new threats however, does not suggest a decline in the traditional maritime security threats. On the contrary, drug trafficking in the Gulf of Honduras has rapidly increased since the start of this year with Honduras seizing 5 tonnes and Guatemala seizing 5.9 tonnes. Mexico, our neighbor to the north has seized three tonnes. These figures are all maritime seizures. Yes we are still receiving reports of ATOIs within our airspace but we must be reminded that the air domain is of significant interest to us as it dominates the entire maritime space above our jurisdiction. We must therefore maintain our coastal watch. Today I can

Our forward deployed strategy is working. However, we must ensure that we increase our patrolling efforts and that we incorporate intelligence into our operational design concept. Yes, we have recognized and accepted shortcomings in these areas and like a progressive, forward thinking Coast Guard we have already implemented counteractive measures such as posting our intelligence officer to the Joint Interagency Task Force S in Key West Florida in February of this year to better improve our regional intelligence picture. In addition, as recent as last week, the Coast Guard is now able to access the Cooperative Situational Information Infrastructure (CSII) and we are also fully a part of the All Partners Access Network (APAN). With these technologies and networks Your Coast Guard is well poised to better deter drug trafficking from our shores.

But there are also other threats that are showing up on the Coast Guard Radar such as coastal piracy, IUU fishing, and illegal firearms. And your Coast Guard will not loose sight of these traditional threats. In August of this year we seized two high powered military grade firearms and ammunition from a remote island that intelligence had indicated was utilized by drug traffickers supplying ambergris caye with illicit drugs.

And whilst our counter piracy efforts are impossible to match last year’s 0 reports of piracy, we have done our utmost best to minimize these random robberies and acts of violence that once plagued our sea spaces.



**“It is therefore incumbent upon the Coast Guard to develop and maintain the capability to support our national emergency management organization.”**





# State of the Coast Guard

Illegal fishing is one of those threats that has a direct negative impact on our economy. Illegal fishing both from our artisanal fleet and from illegitimate foreign fleet continues to offset the efforts put in place by our Fisheries Department. Our Coast Guard continues to support these initiatives and law enforcement operations through deterrence and by interdiction. This year we contributed to more than \$33 thousand dollars worth of fines, and confiscated more than 750 feet of gill nets from our waters. The protection of our marine resources remains a prominent mission for your Coast Guard.

with that in mind that we turned to the Mexican Navy to access their Search planning software. This initiative was birthed out of the Border Commanders Conference where the generosity of Admiral Tlapetla resulted in us accessing the SAROPS tool, making our operations even more effective.

The Success of all these operations, life saving, humanitarian, maritime security, and resource protection shares one successful denominator. And that is our people. Coast Guard men and women underscores the success of our organization. This is where our investment needs to be. This year we have

**“This year we saved 126 lives, including pulling people from the water, recovering vessels in distress and providing emergency medical care whilst underway by our Coast Guard medics”**

These missions, by design, requires collaboration of effort with us and our partners. The Coast Guard supports the interagency approach to security. We rely on information sharing, and joint operations for success. It is in that regard that we have increased our presence at the JIOC by assigning additional personnel to the joint effort. We truly believe that this mechanism is the formula for success.

Turning the page to our most important mission. Saving lives at sea. This year we saved 126 lives including pulling people from the water, recovering vessels in distress, and providing emergency medical care whilst underway by our Coast Guard medics, a critical capability that we added to our SAR unit this year. Despite being successful in our SAR efforts we are constantly seeking improvement to our SAR system. It is

promoted 50 personnel, that’s 10% of the strength of the entire Coast Guard. And 74 personnel have been overseas for some form education or training in support of the Coast Guard mission. That’s 14% of the Coast Guard benefiting directly from overseas opportunities including the United States of America, Mexico, Taiwan, the United Kingdom, Jamaica, Barbados and Guyana.

**And that’s why in September of this year we launched a new operations dubbed “People’s Operation.” Because we found it necessary to concentrate our efforts on the welfare of our people, as they in turn provide service to our nation.** People’s Operation has two lines of efforts that concentrates on immediate actions and long term





# State of the Coast Guard

initiatives to improve salary adjustments for promotions, allowances and increments. Since the launch of Peoples Operations in September we have tripled salary adjustment and we are on a trajectory to hit 90% accuracy by the end of this financial year. This I firmly believe will be our most successful operation upon its completion because our people matters most. And further to Peoples Operation, we continued to invest in our people over the past year providing education opportunities through scholarships, study leave and overseas training.

Coast Guard officers and enlisted are currently enrolled full time at the University of Belize, Galen University, and St Johns Junior College. In addition to these academic programs we have personnels acquiring new skills at the Institute for Technical and Vocational Training in order to support our technical needs across the Coast Guard.

This educational push is a continuous effort to improve

**“This year we promoted 50 personnel, that’s 10% of the strength of the entire Coast Guard. And 74 personnel (14%) have been overseas for some form of education or training ”**

your Belize Coast Guard in different areas and also to expand the scope of our organization. For example, this year we had officers graduating with Bachelors Degrees in Natural Resources Management, Marine Biology, Environmental Science and we enrolled one officer in a Masters of Philosophy in Marine Environmental Science. These are educational programs required to support our Marine Science Branch. This is just one example of why we are investing so heavily in educating our people. Because the Belize Coast Guard is desirous to do more for our nation.

Another significant contribution to the maritime sector is in the area of training. This year we trained boat operators from the Belize Water Service, women from the Seaweed Farmers Association, and we have committed to train rangers from the Turneffe Atoll

Sustainability Association, the San Pedro Belize Express amongst others that have expressed interest in maritime training. These maritime trainings highlights the need for us to do more, for the Coast Guard to take a leading role in a national maritime training initiative. And we have accepted that task. I’m glad to report that we have already commenced discussions in shaping maritime proficiencies across our nation. I’m even more excited to highlight two of our officers that are charged with taking this from concept to capability. Our Training Officer, LT Otto Garcia, who graduated just last month from the University of Guyana with a Masters Degree in Strategic Development, and LCDR Jasmine Bellini who graduated as the top student from the World Maritime University in Sweden with a Masters Degree in Maritime Education and Training. Our Coast Guard is heavily investing in our people so that we can do more for our nation.

The Belize Coast Guard stands proud in this our 19<sup>th</sup>

year of Service to our Nation. We have built a solid, credible maritime service capable of supporting our national maritime interests. And we continue to diversify our service, building a broader scope of operations to support our nation and the region. For instance, the Belize Coast Guard has maintained its readiness in preparation for operations in Haiti. Throughout this year, our special operations group conducted training here in Belize and then in Jamaica as a part of Operation Trogon Shield which was designed to prepare a joint forces team from Bahamas, Jamaica and Belize to form a part of the Multinational Security Support mission to Haiti. Our diversity offers the Ministry of Defence a broader range of military option to choose from and we are excited about the opportunity to demonstrate the Government of Belize’s resolve for maintaining the Caribbean as a region of peace.

# State of the Coast Guard

Looking into next year, the Coast Guard radar is identifying even more exciting programs and initiatives that will be coming online. Our 2<sup>nd</sup> Fleet will be taking shape, expanding its three dimensional nature with additional drones, and new vessels that will be coming on line next year. We will have an inject into our dive team and we will be developing a new capability – K-9 team which will significantly increase our interdiction ability. Our efforts to develop our senior leadership also flashes brightly on the Coast Guard Radar. Our Vice Commandant Captain Soberanis is scheduled to return from the National Defence University in Washington DC, LCDR Freddie Ku will be returning from the ACSC in the UK, whilst LCDR Monima and LCDR Canul will be returning from the Senior Staff Course in Mexico. Our investments in leadership is crucial to the continued success of your Belize Coast Guard and that is why we have also expressed our interest in securing a space at the Inter American Defence College that is administered by the Organization of American States in Washington DC.

The Coast Guard radar is also indicating a recruiting drive for next year. That's right, we are optimistic about recruiting, increasing our numbers to ensure that we can meet the operational demands of our nation.

Lady's and gentlemen, your Belize Coast Guard is a very ambitious organization, one that remains dedicated to the service of this nation. And you may be wondering how an organization that is appropriated \$13.7M is able to provide such a vital service to the nation. This is a phenomena that the leadership team at the Ministry of National Defence and Border Security has been able to

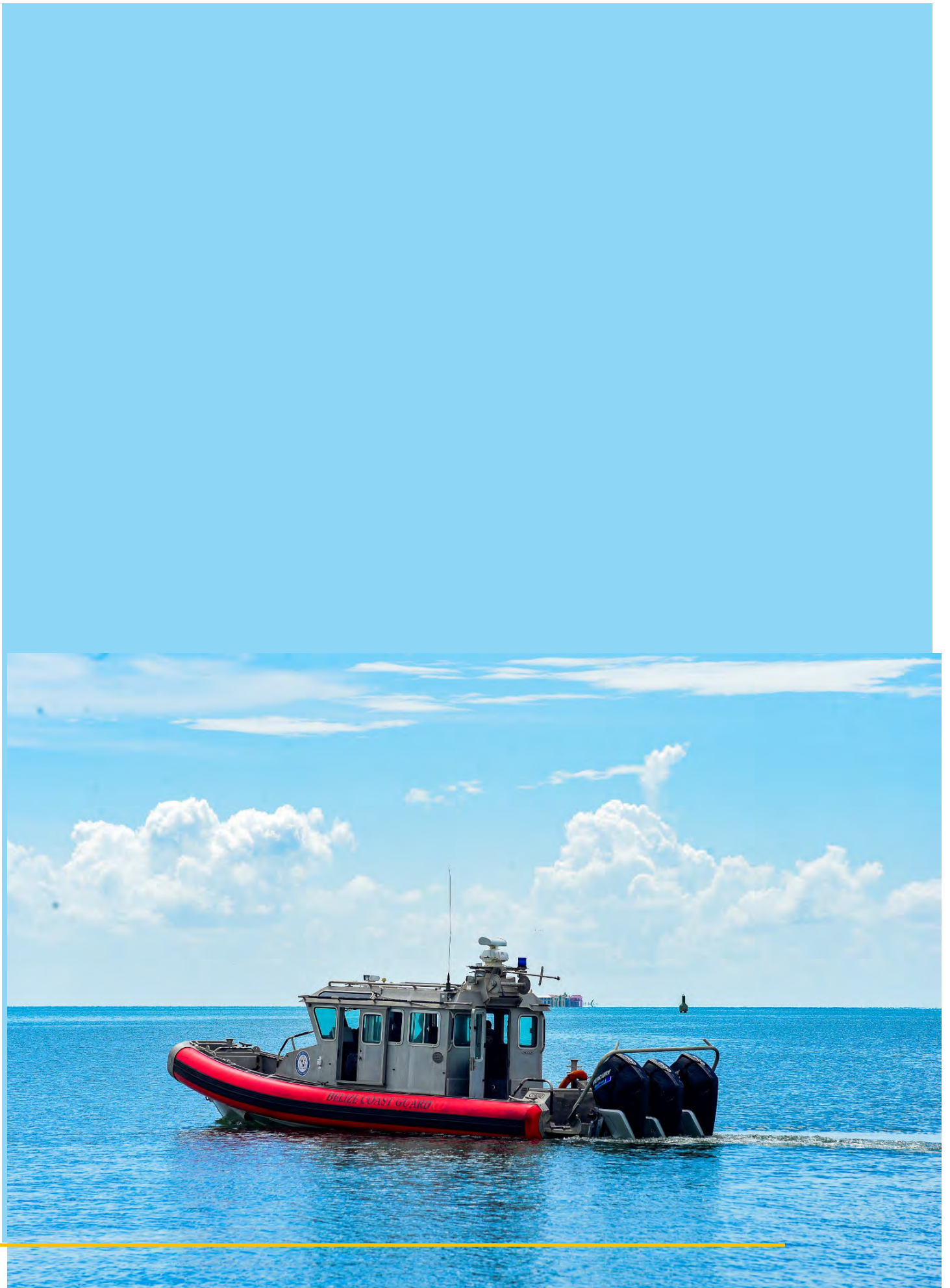
manage. And we are very grateful for the support given. For example the Coast Guard did not have a million dollars to invest into the construction of this facility. But financial creativity resulted in where we are now, inaugurating a state of the art facility for our coastguard to perform its respective duties.

And finally, I would be remis not to acknowledge the service of a very important Coastguardsman who has worn this uniform for the past 19 years. A man who served this country for 35 years. Tomorrow our Chief of Defence Staff Rear Admiral upper half John Borland will serve his last day in uniform and will be venturing on pre retirement leave. Admiral John Borland commanded the Coast Guard from 14 August 2009 to 28 November 2019. Sir, we thank you for your service and everything that you have done for the Defence and Security of this country. The Belize Coast Guard is this apex institution because of your vision and your contribution to its success. Admiral we wish you fair winds and following seas.

So as I close the 19<sup>th</sup> chapter of the Belize Coast Guard I must say thank you first and foremost to the men and women of the Belize Coast Guard for another exemplary year of service, and to our partners we thank you for your continued support and to our leadership team at the Ministry of National Defence and Border Security, thank you for your continued support. *Utrinque Paratus*







# Unmanned Air System Training

Three members of the drone team attended a 5-day training at Mexico City with the Mexican Army special force. This training included the familiarization with all the theoretical part of the Drone Community, standard operating procedures with the focus on military operations, Intelligence Surveillance, Target Acquisition, and reconnaissance.

Furthermore, Drone Squadron Commander was introduced to and had the opportunity to venture into the ANTI-DRONE unit, which centers on the importance of safety against any drone attack.

The most recent training included a refresher on the Perimeter 8+ operator Course and a train the trainer course which has now qualified and certified personnel from the BCG Drone Squadron to perform instructor duties in the capacity building of our future recruits. This training was conducted by personnel from the US Air Force and Fly Alchemy, which is a company that is directly executing missions with the use of the Perimeter 8+ and its different payloads.

The Belize Coast Guard Drone Squadron is a work in progress unit, which has started from point zero and quickly advancing on its number one priority for now, which is the capacity building of the team members. The Drone Squadron are now qualified, certified and ready to perform, thanks to the on-target training conducted and attended by the team members. The drone team members evolved from being just a regular person with the interest of flying a drone, to a very qualified person, who has a vast knowledge of not only commercial Drones and hybrid military UAV's but also the importance of a anti drone system being established on our operation scheme.

Additionally, each drone squadron member is qualified as a Drone instructor, which now grants them the moral obligation to share on the knowledge as we look to advance in line with the everlasting advancement of technology.

The BCG Drone Squadron members have achieved,

1. Understanding the basic principles of UAS.
2. Full awareness of all safety procedures, both for the maintenance of the UAS and most importantly the Human Resources operating the drone.
3. Members are now all qualified as Drone operators.
4. Members are trained for pre-flight set up of drone, in flight monitoring and after flight maintenance of drone.
5. Member are now fully prepared to create flight plans on the ground station and make accurate measurements and correction to flight paths.
6. Members were also exposed to the emergency protocols, in which multiple scenarios were displayed and advised of what to do on each scenario were fully explained.
7. Key to all the training was also team work, in which members were able to develop a more efficient way of operating and communicating between Ground Control Station, Drone Operator and Sensor Operator.









# From Mercury University to Mercury Technician

*PO2 LesPaul Williams*



The Engineering Department of the Coast Guard is a critical capability for the effectiveness of the Belize Coast Guard. Among our responsibilities is ensuring all boat engines are in proper working order. In July 2024, an online course was offered to train to become a mercury engine technician. Mercury engine is one of the most popular boat engines in the world and being certified as an engine technician means that you are able to not only repair engines but you are better able to diagnose and repair and upkeep these crucial equipment.

The Mercury Technician Course is a three-phase program by Mercury International that trains engineers

outboard maintenance, SmartCraft and DTS theory, CDS-G3 Basic Orientation of the G3 Program. Courses like these are very important to ensure that we are constantly improving our skills and developing our knowledge.

For the first time in history Level 2 certification was hosted in Belize, thanks to the vision and foresight of the Belize Coast Guard. Our instructor Mr. Fernando was not an easy instructor, he was very strict and stern when it came to the classroom. We were required to complete numerous readings and practice our technical skills. The sleepless nights were worth it, at the end of the training, we gained a much better understanding on how to diagnose engine problems using computer software.

Of the 13 who completed the Level 2 training, 4 of us were selected to do the level 3 training in Cancun. This portion was a hands-on training where we applied the theory and skills learnt in the previous levels. Our instructor Mr Alana, taught us how to identify and repair more complex mechanical problems. An important portion was also the maintenance and upkeep of the machines. We are proud to say that after the training, the Belize Coast Guard now has 4 internationally certified Mercury Technicians.

**“ The Belize Coast Guard now has 4 internationally certified Mercury Technicians”**

worldwide to become Certified Mercury Technicians. Focused on V6, V8, and V10 outboard engines, it emphasizes the G3 diagnostic system for troubleshooting and repair. The program combines theoretical knowledge and hands-on training, covering basic maintenance, advanced diagnostics, and real-world applications. Rigorous testing throughout ensures high standards, fostering international collaboration and preparing participants for field challenges. Graduates earn a globally recognized certification, reflecting their expertise in maintaining and repairing Mercury engines.

The journey to becoming a technician began as an online course on July 1, 2024. We all had an equal chance to enrol in this course and increase our knowledge and skills. The Level 1 course was more of an introduction course, where engineers had the opportunity to refresh their knowledge on the fundamentals of engines, basic

This training was invaluable to our development as boat engineers and for the overall progress of the engineer department. By having certified technicians, we are better equipped to ensure the smooth operation of our engines and equipment. This translates into shorter repair times or less costly repairs. The overall experience during the training was positive - while some areas were challenging, the benefits far outweighed the difficulties. The training also provided an opportunity to travel which also has its benefits, as we are able to learn and improve among our international counterparts. I encourage everyone to seize the opportunities for training and development - the only limit is the one we place on ourselves.





# Ministry of National Defence and Border Security

This is to Certify that the Chairman of the Coast Guard Board has Awarded

## *Coast Guard Board Commendation*



TO **Lieutenant Commander Freddie Ku**

For Exceptional meritorious service whilst assigned as the Director of the Joint Intelligence and Operation Centre. Your professionalism and dedication to duty manifested in positive results in our national effort in countering transnational and organized crime in Belize. Your leadership over your three year assignment has critically advanced the JIOC's contribution to National Security

Given under my hand in the City of Belmopan

This seventeenth day of July 2024

**Florencio Marin Jr**

Minister of National Defence and Border Security  
Chairman of the Coast Guard Board

**Dario Tapia**

Brigadier General (Ret)  
Chief Executive Officer,  
Ministry of National Defence and Border Security

The Watchstander is proud to acknowledge the accomplishment of Lieutenant Commander Freddie Ku for receiving a Commendation from the Belize Coast Guard Board. LCDR Freddie Ku was appointed as the Director of the Joint Intelligence and Operation Center (JIOC) from September 2021 to July 2024.

Lieutenant Commander Freddie Ku's assignment as the Director of the JIOC comes to an end in August of this year. He will complete three years in that capacity before departing for the Advance and Command Staff Course in the United Kingdom. During his three years as Director, Lieutenant Commander Freddie Ku made positive changes, and initiated long term programs in the best interest of Belize's effort in countering transnational and organized crime.

Lieutenant Commander Freddie Ku designed an operational plan that immediately had positive effects upon his appointment at the JIOC. It required accessing

intelligence from partner nations and directing the Joint Enforcement Teams to the right location at the right time. This required the synchronization of forces and intelligence whilst preventing the leakage of intelligence during operations. This operational plan had a significant impact on the drug flow through Belize. Under his directorship the JIOC seized two narco planes and their cargo curbed corruption, and reduced drug plane landing in Belize by 86%.

Lieutenant Commander Freddie Ku has been exemplary in his capacity as Director JIOC. Even more impressive is that he is one rank below the required post as Director, and has not attended a Senior Staff Course, which is considered as a pre requisite for such assignment.

# Security Cooperation with Mexico

## Border Commanders Conference



From November 6-8, 2024, the Military and Naval Commanders of Belize and Mexico, who share maritime and terrestrial boundaries, met in Belize City to discuss a broad range of traditional security-related challenges, including drug trafficking, weapon smuggling, illegal migration and contraband.

Representing Belize and the Ministry of National Defence and Border Security at the Conference were Deputy Commander of the Belize Defence Force, Colonel Anthony Velasquez, and Commandant of the Belize Coast Guard, Rear Admiral Elton Bennett. The Mexican delegation included Commanders from the Secretariat of Defence of Mexico and the Secretariat of the Navy of Mexico.

Discussions focused on the critical role of the military in

ensuring citizen security and fostering a stable environment for economic prosperity. Of significant interest to both delegations was the military's capacity to provide humanitarian assistance and disaster relief, especially in response to non-traditional security threats related to climate change, such as fighting wildfires, flood relief operations, and hurricane support operations.

The Conference concluded with both countries reiterating their commitment to share information and intelligence to close gaps within the border security system and to conduct joint operations along maritime and terrestrial border regions of both countries to counter transnational organized crime.



# Educational Accomplishments

## Masters of Science Degree in Strategic Development



Lieutenant Otto Garcia proudly received his Masters of Science Degree in Strategic Development after two years of successful research and study at the University of Guyana. Lieutenant Garcia received a scholarship from the University of Guyana in 2022 and with the support of the Guyana Defence Force attended the residence course in Georgetown Guyana. He is a graduate of the Guyana Standard Officer Course and

had previously earned an Associates of Arts in General Studies in 2019 from the University of Guyana.

Lieutenant Otto Garcia is currently employed as the Coast Guard Training Officer. Congratulations Lieutenant Garcia!

## Masters of Science Degree in Maritime Affairs



Congratulations are in order for Lieutenant Commander Jasmine Bellini for graduating with top honours earning a Masters of Science Degree in Maritime Affairs from the World Maritime University in Malmo Sweden. Lieutenant Commander Bellini received the Chancellor's award for being the top academic student; which was issued by the Secretary General of the International Maritime Organization. She

was also awarded for having the top academic performance in the Maritime Education and Training specialization. In addition to her academic achievements, Lieutenant Commander Bellini received the Kalmar Award for Role Models recognized by the University.

As Vice President of the Student Government she represented the finest of leadership that the Coast Guard is very proud of.

# Sailor of the Month

## October



**1103 PETTY OFFICER  
CLASS 1  
GENARO CHAN**

Petty Officer First Class (PO1) G. Chan exemplifies what it means to be a well-rounded and exceptional sailor in the Belize Coast Guard. His outstanding performance in both Alpha and Bravo Companies highlights his versatility and ability to excel in diverse operational environments. As a patrol commander, PO1 Chan has achieved numerous operational successes, demonstrating his tactical expertise and unwavering commitment to mission accomplishment.

Beyond his operational achievements, PO1 Chan has proven to be an outstanding mentor and leader. He consistently supports his subordinates, guiding them to improve their readiness and develop professionally. His dedication to fostering a culture of growth and excellence within his team directly contributes to the Belize Coast Guard's overall mission and vision.

PO1 Chan's exemplary performance, leadership, and commitment to the Coast Guard's values make him a deserving recipient of the Sailor of the month award. He is a role model for his peers and subordinates alike, embodying the highest standards of professionalism, service, and dedication to duty.

## November



**PETTY OFFICER CLASS II JERALDO TECK**

As a boat engineer for the Belize Coast Guard, Petty Officer Teck has consistently demonstrated exceptional dedication, technical skill, and an outstanding work ethic, especially over this past month.

Petty Officer Teck recently took on a critical project that required significant technical expertise and strong problem-solving abilities. His role in this project was essential, and he not only met but exceeded all expectations. Through his hard work and initiative, he ensured the successful completion of the assignment, contributing greatly to the operational readiness of our fleet. His technical knowledge as a boat engineer is impressive, but it is his proactive approach and ability to collaborate with his team that truly set him apart.

In addition to his recent achievements, Petty Officer Teck consistently displays a high level of professionalism and commitment to the mission of the Belize Coast Guard. His tireless dedication to maintaining our equipment and ensuring that our vessels are always mission-ready is a testament to his leadership and reliability. He is well-respected among his peers and superiors alike for his positive attitude and his willingness to go above and beyond.

## December



**PETTY OFFICER CLASS III NOEL AVILA**

PO3 Noel Avila is acknowledged for his actions and bravery the night of 15th October 2024 in the search and recovery of 6-year-old King Shakel Wade. He reported to work as any other day and was available for any tasking. He was driving SCPO H. Nunez in town when he received a call about the incident. PO3 Avila did not hesitate and mentioned to SCPO Nunez that he could drive to the area of the accident. He immediately did so. This allowed for the OPS Chief to arrive at the scene while waiting for the other BCG members to arrive. He did not hesitate to get into the canal. He was able to quickly deduce where he should start searching and his selfless act inspired other onlookers to jump in as well. That night there was hundreds of people by the canal side looking in but very few actually jumped in. PO3 Avila knew it was his duty to do so without being told to. His quick thinking shortened the search time as within minutes of him jumping in the boy's body was found. After he helped get the body out of the water, he continued to show presence by clearing the area for the medic team to do their job. He went so far to ensure those with video cameras were far from the body to respect the deceased and family's privacy in such a fragile time. His actions are commendable and deserve recognition. It reiterates what it means to embody the Coast Guard's motto of being Ready for Anything.



# End of Year Awards

2024



## Commandants Award

*P01 Genaro Chan*

## Sailor of the Year

*P03 Guillermina Pinnock*

## Patrol Commander

*CPO Windel Ogaldez*

## Coxswain of the year

*P03 Daniel Gregorio*

## Engineer of the Year

*SN Dennis Hernandez*

## Seaman of the Year

*SN Earl Bowden*

## Serviceman of the Year

*P03 Adair Duran*

## Unit of the Year

*Medical Crew*

## HERMELINDA PINKS AWARD

*Mr. Abdul Zelaya*





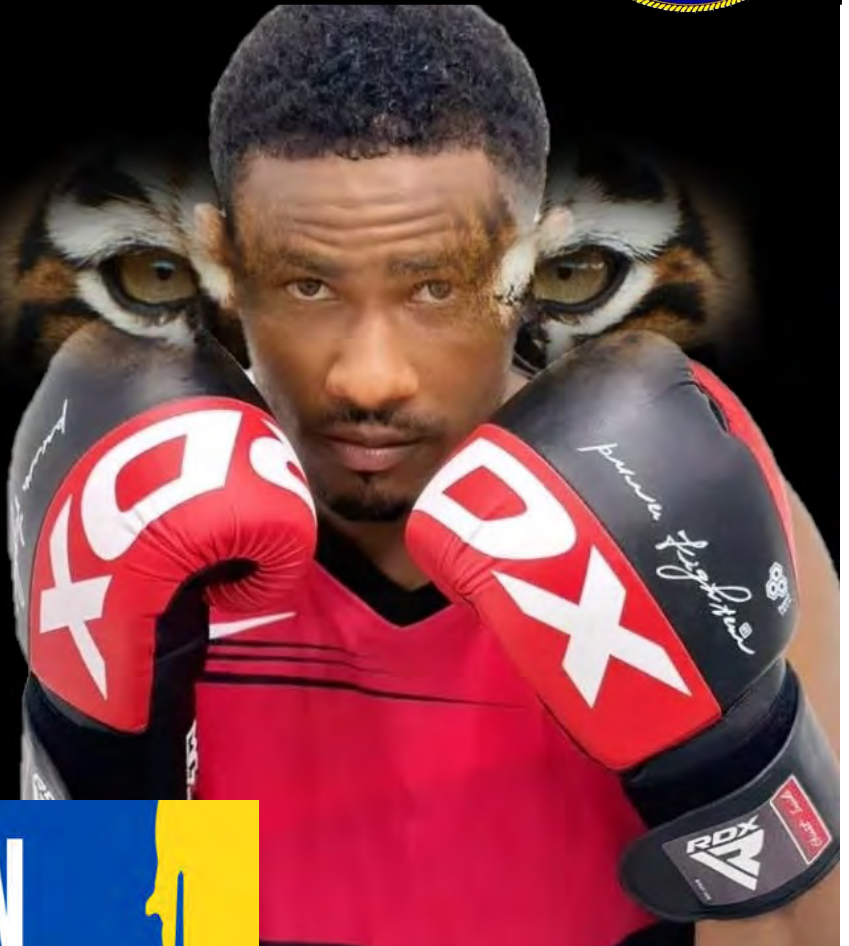
# Sports



Seaman Cyril Martinez became a professional boxer after only three amateur fights. He becomes the Belize Coast Guard first professional athlete. He started boxing only three years ago and has attracted coaches, scouts enthusiasts and has certainly his fellow shipmates in the Coast Guard.

His boxing career surged after Coast Guard Station Barranco initiated a boxing program in Punta Gorda. Seaman Cyril Martinez has since then revamped Boxing in Punta Gorda though inspiration.

His first professional fight was against a Mexican national Victor Najar where



## LION MAN Triathlon



**CHAMPION**  
1:18:38

**MAURO CUCUL**

Lion Man Triathlon is back! That means Coast Guard's top Triathlete is back on the podium. Ens. Mauro Cucul, who has been Belize's best marathon runner, has been diversifying his ability by venturing into the sport of triathlon. Even after suffering a fractured leg he has rebounded well to win the country's most popular triathlon race LION MAN.

He won the race in a total time of 1:18:38. He started with an impressive 14 minute swim, recovered during the run and then blew his opponents away in his strong point, running.



# A NEW RECORD

Belize Coast Guard's Albert Davis now owns the End of the World Half Marathon Record 1:13:38



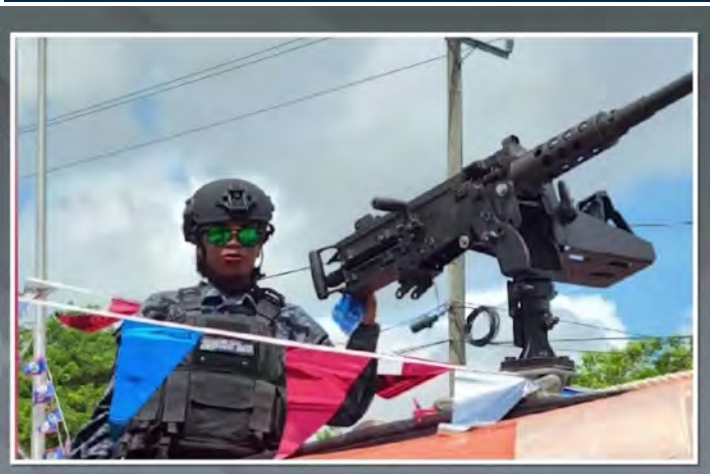


# *In Loving Memory of Seaman Gianna Vanegas*

What the Prime Minister thought of her



What her Shipmates thought of her



What the photographers thought of her



What beauty queens thought of her



What her gym buddies thought of her



What she thought about herself





# Strategic Mission

To 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 operations

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