

The Ins and Outs of TACLET South

Story by PA3 Barry Jeffrey Bena, D7 Public Affairs

MIAMI -- For members of the military, deployments are a simple fact of life. It could be in the form of combat such as Operation Iraqi Freedom, participating in an exercise, or supporting a humanitarian operation overseas. At some point in their Coast Guard careers Coast Guard personnel may want to experience for themselves all that a deployment has to offer. Never is this truer, than for the members of Coast Guard Tactical Law Enforcement Team South.

TACLET South is a deployable, law-enforcement team, consisting of law enforcement detachments (LEDETS) based at Coast Guard Air Station Miami. Their primary mission is counter-drug law enforcement. They continually deploy teams to the Caribbean, Pacific Ocean and Persian Gulf with deployments lasting 45 to 90 days. At a minimum, each member can expect to be deployed for 185 days of the year, normally on a Navy ship.

TACLET South uses its seven-to nine-member LEDETS to accomplish its missions using a variety of tactics including Unannounced Nighttime Boardings (UNB).

UNB is the nighttime boarding of a vessel at sea conducted without giving the captain or crew of the vessel any warning beforehand that they will be boarded by the Coast Guard. This tactic provides the team an added advantage when boarding suspected drug-smuggling vessels.

“If there are drugs on board, the ships’ crew will not have any time to set fire to the drugs or the ship to avoid the boarding,” said Lt. Frank Florio, operations officer for TACLET South.

Aerial Use of Force, employed from either a Coast Guard or other allied-forces helicopter, is another tactic in the TACLET’s arsenal. The AUF process involves the use of warning shots fired from an M-240 machine gun. If the fleeing vessel still refuses to heave-to after the warning shots, authorization is requested via the chain of command to use disabling fire. Disabling fire comes in the form of rounds fired by a marksman using a 50-caliber rifle. TACLET South was the first unit within the Coast Guard to be authorized to use AUF against go-fast vessels.

TACLET South’s hard work and training have paid big dividends including a unit, record- breaking 90,000 pounds of cocaine seized in 14 drug interdictions during 2006 with 93 suspected drug traffickers detained. Those 90,000 pounds of cocaine accounted for 29 percent of the total amount seized by the Coast Guard that year. TACLET South also played a very important role when in the Persian Gulf.

“Most people don’t even know we’re there, but we are,” said Lt. Scott Toves, executive officer of TACLET South.

In 2006, while supporting Operations Iraqi Freedom and Enduring Freedom, a Law Enforcement Team (LEDET) from TACLET South conducted 29 random boardings on vessels entering the Persian Gulf. These boardings were critical to the safety and security of two Iraqi offshore oil terminals. According to Toves, there is always a team from TACLET South in the Persian Gulf helping defend those vital oil terminals. LEDETs deployed in support of OIF and OEF also conduct law enforcement training sessions with other countries' forces.

TACLET South has provided law enforcement training to 292 law enforcement and military personnel from 13 countries, including 252 personnel from Iraq, Bahrain and Kuwait. The training covered room and compartment clearing, proper use of ion scan devices and handcuffing techniques.

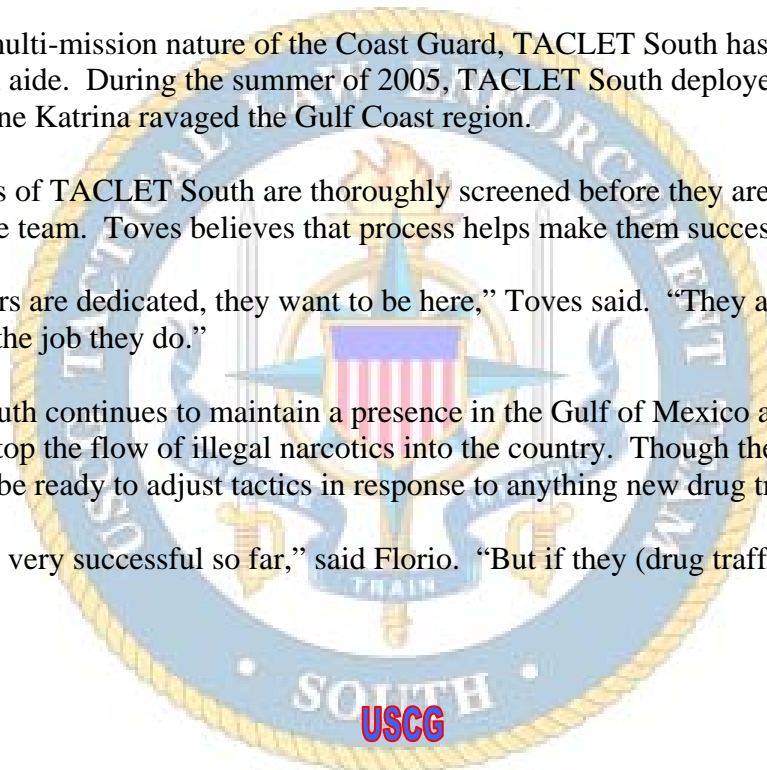
True to the multi-mission nature of the Coast Guard, TACLET South has also provided humanitarian aid. During the summer of 2005, TACLET South deployed to Louisiana after Hurricane Katrina ravaged the Gulf Coast region.

The members of TACLET South are thoroughly screened before they are allowed to transfer to the team. Toves believes that process helps make them successful.

“Our members are dedicated, they want to be here,” Toves said. “They are dedicated to training and the job they do.”

TACLET South continues to maintain a presence in the Gulf of Mexico and Caribbean Sea to help stop the flow of illegal narcotics into the country. Though their tactics work, they have to be ready to adjust tactics in response to anything new drug traffickers do.

“We’ve been very successful so far,” said Florio. “But if they (drug traffickers) step up, so shall we.”



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