

.....So Wait, What Happens After Graduation???? (Continued)

As part of alien migrant interdiction operations along the coast of Cuba and Haiti, I got to participate in the interception of many illegal migrants, and was responsible for the proper care, treatment, and disposition of these migrants. Along the way, we got to go to Key West (three times), Guantanamo Bay, and Cozumel, Mexico, as well as swim in the clear blue waters of the Caribbean (pictured).



As morale officer, I was placed in charge of organizing and carrying out *Cypress'* most ambitious community outreach project in recent memory: a "Haunted Ship" event to raise money for a local food bank. During this event, *Cypress* moved berths to downtown Pensacola, we decorated our ship with the scariest themes we could think of, and scared 2,600 people who visited the ship while raising over 4,000 pounds of food for charity. The Haunted Ship was the first of its kind in the Pensacola area, and we have now are planning for our third scary event in October 2014.



In the Gulf, hurricanes are sort of a big deal, which is why all of *Cypress* breathed a sigh of relief when Tropical Storm Sandy started tracking to the East Coast in October 2012. However, as soon as Sandy passed east of Florida, I received a call on my cell phone. "Mr. White, we are going to be leaving for a while later today..." and just like that, I packed up, and in an hour was on the boat and prepared to make our way to New York for Superstorm Sandy response for a month. We went through some rough seas to arrive in Virginia, and later New York, but *Cypress'* response efforts immediately following the storm were much appreciated by the communities hardest hit, opening up vital waterways for marine traffic to use. Although this trip was as exhausting as it was unexpected, it was rewarding to be able to assist in such a time of need.

In the Coast Guard, cell phone calls from work are rarely a good thing. The best you can expect is, "Can you come in right now?" and the most disrupting is "pack your bags." Once again, we got another very unexpected phone call. A rig in the Gulf of Mexico had exploded, and *Cypress* had to go coordinate response efforts and enforce a security zone around the rig. As you can see, the rig had been burning like the end of a roman candle for days, and the Coast Guard was tasked with overseeing response efforts. We enforced an exclusion zone around the rig, and acted as the Coast Guard's eyes and ears on the water. After a couple false alarms, the fire was put out and all was back to normal in the Gulf of Mexico.



And, of course, in the midst of all of this, we worked buoys. A LOT of buoys. I know it is hard to imagine what that means, but basically, our main mission is to service Aids to Navigation. This involves keeping station next to a buoy; lifting the 14,000-pound aid on the deck; changing out the chain, lights and the 12,000-pound cement block that holds it to the bottom; and ensuring that it is exactly where the chart says it is. It is no small feat, and for *Cypress* to have serviced over 120 aids since I reported is impressive in itself along with the missions mentioned above.



I did enjoy the Academy. However, even if I hated it, I do believe that it is worth the pain and effort in order to become a Coast Guard officer. As I wrap up my first tour, my satisfaction comes from the difference I helped make and the friends I have made in the process.

I also would be remiss (and likely in trouble) to forget to mention that in May 2013, I got married to the love of my life! Julianna White is also a CG Academy graduate, and is currently a student engineer on CGC *Decisive*, a 210-foot cutter out of Pascagoula, Mississippi. If you would like a girl's (strong) opinion, you could email her at Julianna.V.White@uscg.mil. As always, please email me at Nathaniel.D.White@uscg.mil with any questions; I am more than happy to answer questions about the Academy, the fleet, or how to live in a room the size of a small closet.

Until next time,
Nate