

Coast Guard holds memorial to honor fallen crew members of Coast Guard Cutter Blackthorn

ST. PETERSBURG, Fla. – Coast Guard crew members from across the country held a memorial service honoring the fallen crew members from Coast Guard Cutter Blackthorn, Sunday, at the Blackthorn Memorial site in St. Petersburg.

The memorial ceremony marked the 44th anniversary of the 23 lives lost during the collision between Coast Guard Cutter Blackthorn and the motor vessel Capricorn near the Sunshine Skyway Bridge on Jan. 28, 1980. The ship had a crew complement of 50.

"The Coast Guard as an organization continues to take lessons learned from this tragedy to refine our operations," said Rear Adm. Douglas M. Schofield, Coast Guard District Seven commander. "Coast Guard Cutter William Flores, homeported in Miami, was named in honor of Blackthorn crew member and Coast Guard medal award winner for his heroism 44 years ago. Our crew is proud to stand the watch as we remember the crews before us."

The Blackthorn collision forever changed the Coast Guard and provided lessons on risk management and training. After this tragedy, the Coast Guard made critical improvements to service readiness, training, and safety. It provided the impetus for the establishment of the Command and Operations School at the Coast Guard Academy in New London, Connecticut. The school offers courses to prepare command-level officers and senior enlisted members for command duty afloat.

The ceremony included a fly over by Coast Guard Air Station Clearwater, wreath laying, an honor platoon representing each Blackthorn victim, laying of roses, gun salute, and presiding official comments from Rear Adm. Douglas M. Schofield, Coast Guard District Seven commander and Vice Adm. Kevin E. Lunday, Coast Guard Atlantic Area commander.



Many groups and civilians attended the event including the C. G. Aux



C. G. Aux members from flotilla 11-1 and 11-10. From left to right unknown, Matt Copeland VCDR, Stephan Bielowski DCDR, Harvey Prior IPDCDR



Harvey Prior IPDCDR on the right, others unknown



Coasties preparation for the Blackthorn ceremony.

Photos by Jon Nicholls