

There's a first time for everything

Story by PA1 Dana Warr, D7 Public Affairs

MIAMI -- During Super Bowl XLI in Miami there happened to be a few “firsts”, both on the field and off. On the field, Tony Dungy, the Indianapolis Colts head coach, became the first African-American coach to win the Super Bowl. Off the field, the USS *Gridley* (DDG 101) became the first Navy vessel to be commissioned in Miami Feb. 10.

With the first ever commissioning of a Navy ship in Miami, Coast Guard Sector Miami personnel went into over-time and developed a game plan to defend the *Gridley* and its sailors for 11 consecutive days.

The naval vessel already has a Naval Vessel Protection Zone around the ship which is enforced by either Coast Guard or Navy patrols. The Coast Guard Captain of the Port went a step further and shut down the entire Miami Channel along the north side of the Port of Miami to all vessel traffic and closed the west turning basin for a night during Super Bowl festivities and fireworks at Bicentennial Park in downtown Miami.

“While we have had many naval vessel visits and other prominent events in South Florida, the *Gridley*'s 11 day stay, the height of cruise season in one of the largest cruise ship ports in the world and a full week of Super Bowl activities, once again placed Miami in the global spotlight and warranted a heightened security posture on the waterfront,” said Capt. Karl Schultz, commanding officer of Coast Guard Sector Miami and Captain of the Port.

The ship arrived Feb. 2 with pomp and circumstance surrounded by patriotic boaters as well as a slew of law enforcement boats from Miami, Miami-Dade, Miami Beach, Aventura, and Sunny Isle Police Departments, Miami-Dade Fire and Rescue and Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission.

“Our local and state agency partnership was a key factor in helping us augment our own resources,” said Lt. Michael Russell, planning officer for waterside security during Super Bowl week. “If we didn't have the support from the local and state agencies, the Coast Guard would have needed to request additional support.”

The fun was about to begin for the sailors of the *Gridley* but the tedious task of enforcing a security zone in body of water with lines invisible to the public was just beginning.

The plan was to protect the ship using security zones, NVPZ and regulated navigational areas for 11 days enforced by 14 federal, state and local agency assets.

“It was not only a plan to prepare for any incident that may occur while the vessel was moored along the Port of Miami, it was also a strategic plan to help our law enforcement partners understand each phase surrounding the *Gridley*'s arrival in conjunction with surrounding Super Bowl sanctioned events along the water,” said Russell.

The law clearly states that no vessel will be allowed into the security zone and any person seeking to enter or transit the zone must seek permission from the Captain of the Port or designated representative.

It also states that the maximum civil penalty for violating a security zone is a \$32,500 fine and the maximum criminal penalty for willful violation is 10 years in prison and up to a \$250,000 fine.

A priority of the Coast Guard command at Sector Miami was also to make sure the public was aware of these penalties and make them aware of the security zones, regulated navigational areas and the NVPZ during those days.

To accomplish this, the Coast Guard Auxiliary was asked to help and help they did. Flyers were created and printed for distribution to the local marinas. The Auxiliary also had face-to-face interaction with boaters on the water.

“The work of the auxiliary was tremendous,” said Russell. “Without the Auxiliary’s assistance, we would have had a challenging time in providing outreach to our local maritime community. A tremendous thank you goes out to the Coast Guard Auxiliary for their devoted time and services in helping the Sector conduct its outreach to the public, which clearly saved us time and resources during this event.”

The command at Sector Miami was not only able to enforce the security zones by using alternate resources among the different agencies working in South Florida but, there outreach efforts were so effective they were had no willful violation of any of the areas enforced.

The Super Bowl will return for the tenth time to Miami in 2010 and with its return will most likely come a different set of challenges that Sector Miami will have to overcome and adapt to, making yet another “first” for Miami.

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