USCG Middle East Commander Calls Kodiak Home

Tuesday, 17 June 2008

Capt. Matthew Bell, commanding officer of Coast Guard Patrol Forces Southwest Asia, salutes Capt. Glenn Grahl at a change of command ceremony for Coast Guard forces in the Middle East Monday. The salute signifies that Capt. Bell has properly relieved Capt. Grahl. Bell and his family live in Kodiak. (Coast Guard photo by ETC Christopher Smith, Patrol Forces Southwest Asia).

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Casey Kelly/KMXT

The former commanding officer of the Kodiak-based Coast Guard cutter Alex Haley is now the commander of U.S. Coast Guard forces in the Middle East supporting Operation Iraqi Freedom. KMXT's Casey Kelly has this profile of Commodore Matthew Bell, who despite being halfway around the world still calls Kodiak home.

Matthew Bell has been in the Middle East for about three weeks now, and he says he’s just starting to get used to the weather.

(Bell 1 :31s “…temperature down a little bit.”)

Bell assumed control of the Coast Guard’s Southwest Asia patrol forces at a ceremony Monday in Bahrain, where his command office is located. He now has six Coast Guard patrol boats, five Navy patrol boats, a large support unit in Bahrain, a training team in Iraq, and a Coast Guard forward operating base at the Kuwait Navy Base under his command. He spent the week before the ceremony familiarizing himself with the region.

(Bell 2 :09s “…different units that work for us.”)

Coast Guard crews in the Middle East work with other coalition forces to protect two large offshore oil platforms that account for a sizable chunk of Iraq’s domestic income. Considering the environment, both physical and political, it’s no surprise that Bell says operating in the Persian Gulf is a lot different than patrolling the Bering Sea. Although most of his work will be done behind a desk at his office in Bahrain, he says his philosophy is to get out and work with those under his command whenever he can.

(Bell 3 :22s “…so I can get a little taste of it.”)

Having spent 22 years in the Coast Guard, Bell has been through Alaska a number of times with a couple different boats. His most recent job was chief of cutter forces for the Pacific Area based in Alameda, California. Before that he served as commanding officer of the Kodiak-based Alex Haley starting in 2004. He says that was the first time his family was able to come to Kodiak with him.

(Bell 4 :04s “…we’re gonna retire here!”)

He and his wife Nancy bought a house in Kodiak about a year and half ago. They have three boys: Nicholas, who will be a sophomore at Kodiak High School in August; Matthew, who just graduated from KHS and is off to college in New York; and Richard who is in his second tour of duty with the Marines in Japan.

(Bell 5 :05s “…can’t wait to get back.”)

Bell’s assignment in the Middle East is for one year, after which he says he’ll probably be transferred. He says he plans to apply for other positions within the Coast Guard, but will hopefully be able to spend as much time in Kodiak as possible.

I’m Casey Kelly.

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