

US COAST GUARD CUTTER NANTUCKET

▶ **USES PETRON PLUS HIGH-TEMP, EXTREME-PRESSURE, MULTI-PURPOSE LITHIUM COMPLEX GREASE**

CUSTOMER TESTIMONIAL

CUSTOMER PROFILE

Between the months of May and August, 1994, the U.S. Coast Guard Cutter Nantucket saved 1,208 lives off the coast of Cuba. This account records one day in the life of the Nantucket and her crew.

Although her mission is one of supreme mercy, the view from the deck of the U.S. Coast Guard Cutter Nantucket borders on the apocalyptic. Having pulled a half dozen Cuban balseros from the turbulent Florida Straits, the cutter's crew has soaked a wallowing raft in diesel fuel and set it ablaze.



Black smoke surrounds the ship and trails westward with moderate trade wind as other deserted rafts burn and founder. If not disposed of, the rafts will become hazards to navigation and false targets of rescue for the 30 or so Coast Guard vessels and their assisting Navy consorts involved in the mammoth search-and-rescue effort Operation Able Vigil.

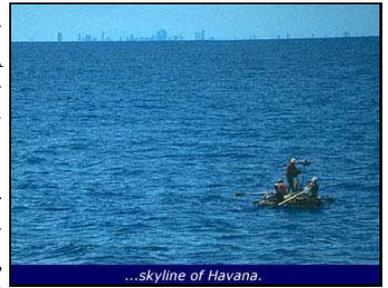
The Nantucket accelerates toward another raft, adrift a half mile dead ahead, its frantic occupants waving alternately at the approaching cutter and a press helicopter hovering 50 feet above them, it's blade wash raising a misty tornado around the balseros. The craft is so low in the water that the balseros appear to be standing on the sea surface itself.



A mile to the northeast, a Coast Guard Jayhawk helicopter circles a U.S. Navy frigate then banks southward, where some two miles distant several rafts drift just inside the 12-mile limit of Cuban territorial waters. The occupants are hoping that wind and current will soon put them within reach of rescue. The Coast Guard watches these people intently and is willing to violate Cuban sovereignty to save lives in imminent peril. The situation is made doubly tense by the presence of a Cuban gunboat cruising a few miles inside the limit.



Beyond the line of waiting balseros rises the sawtooth skyline of Havana. Only the taller buildings are visible from offshore, giving the startling illusion that the island itself is sinking. A coastal oil refinery burnoff and a thunderhead spouting veined lightning from the inland mountains the apocalyptic impression of a doomed land, with the rafters the vanguard of a mass desertion.



...skyline of Havana.

On the decks of the Nantucket, the freshly rescued balseros react to their sudden change in circumstance in different ways: A young woman hugs her infant daughter, emotionally torn between unbridled joy at being delivered from the sea and fear of an uncertain future. A feeble, dehydrated old man mumbles a religious litany as he is carried to the bridge for medical attention. A wild-eyed young man rails at no one in particular that he is a Russian citizen. It may be a ploy to avoid the internment camp at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, but maybe not – his severely broken English is oddly accented and his fair hair and light complexion are decidedly non-latino. Two other men clutch the aft rail of the cutter, watching stunned as their raft burns to the waterline and sinks, vanishing as irrevocably as the lives they left behind.



...hugs her infant daughter...



...old man...



...watching stunned...

Amidst the psychological turmoil the calm efficiency of the Nantucket's crew prevents the situation from getting out of hand. Once on board, the balseros are guided to the aft deck where they are searched, courteously, for weapons and contraband (rarely is anything of the sort found). Those in need of medical attention are singled out quickly, and blankets and water are distributed.

The Nantucket has been doing essentially nonstop search-and-rescue operations for the four months she has been stationed at the Coast Guard's Key West base (she was also an important player in the Haitian rescue mission Operation Able Manner); however, her crew shows no signs of impatience or ill temper. On the contrary, what stands out are touching acts of kindness: A bosun's mate kneels by a young woman dressed in little more than rags and holds a seasickness bag for her. One of the two Marines on board reunites a pre-adolescent girl with her family after they become separated in the boarding process. One of the ship's two Spanish-speaking crew members relays a distraught woman's fear that her family's photographs remain on the raft about to be set afire, another member boards the diesel-soaked craft to find them.



...touching acts of kindness...

God Bless America and the US Coast Guard!

