

PREPARED STATEMENT OF RADM WILLIAM H. STEWART, USCG
COMMANDER, EIGHTH COAST GUARD DISTRICT
BEFORE THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES SELECT COMMITTEE
ON NARCOTICS ABUSE AND CONTROL

December 12, 1983

Mister Chairman and Members of the Committee, I am Rear Admiral William H. STEWART, Commander of the Eighth Coast Guard District. I welcome the opportunity to discuss Coast Guard maritime narcotics interdiction efforts with this Sub-Committee.

The Eighth Coast Guard District encompasses a large water area, approximately 100,000 square miles of the Gulf of Mexico. It includes the states of Alabama, Louisiana, Mississippi, Texas, New Mexico and part of the State of Florida. To support the Coast Guard drug interdiction effort in this area, the following multi-mission assets are available: ten 82 foot patrol boats, two seagoing buoy tenders, eleven helicopters at three locations (Houston, Corpus Christi, New Orleans), seven fixed wing aircraft at Corpus Christi and Mobile, and utility boats at eleven Coast Guard stations along the coast from Panama City, Florida to Port Isabel, Texas. Four medium endurance cutters are homeported in the Eighth District but operate primarily in the Yucatan area, which is presently under the operational control of the Seventh Coast Guard District headquartered in Miami.

With these assets, the Eighth Coast Guard District carries out an aggressive law enforcement program in support of maritime narcotics interdiction along the Gulf Coast. Patrol boats, utility boats, and buoy tenders conduct both coastal and offshore patrols on either dedicated missions or in conjunction with other Coast Guard missions. Aircraft patrols are regularly conducted in the Gulf along the coast, independently or in conjunction with surface patrols. Recently, we have begun to extend the range of our patrol boats by conducting multi-unit law enforcement patrols, well offshore, for up to ten day periods, using seagoing buoy tenders as "motherships" for fuel, water, spare parts, and communications relay. This has worked well in the past and will be used more extensively in the future.

The Coast Guard also responds in a timely fashion to intelligence which indicates the presence, in Eighth District waters, of a drug laden vessel or smuggling operation. Our assets are also deployed on joint operations with other agencies from federal, state and local governments. We maintain a strong liaison program with the other federal agencies involved in narcotics activities such as the Drug Enforcement Administration, U. S. Customs Service, Bureau of Alcohol Tobacco and Firearms, and the Federal Bureau of Investigation. Liaison officers have been detailed to the Organized Crime Drug

Enforcement Task Forces in the core cities of Houston, St. Louis and Atlanta. Each of these Task Forces has jurisdiction within some part of the Eighth District. Having liaison officers on-site ensures effective coordination with the Task Forces. To ensure cooperation at the local and state levels, the Coast Guard is a member of the Law Enforcement Coordination Committees operating under the direction of the Justice Department in the various U. S. Attorney Offices. Our local commands coordinate with their local law enforcement counterparts and this effort has borne fruit. One of our notable successes occurred on 15 January 1983 at Grand Isle, Louisiana. This case involved 12 tons of marijuana on the fishing vessel CAPT KURT. The original information came from the Federal Bureau of Investigation in the fall of 1982. Ultimately the Drug Enforcement Administration, the U. S. Customs Service, the Louisiana State Police, the La Fourche Parish Sheriff's Office and the U. S. Attorney in New Orleans became involved. A joint Command Post was established at the Eighth Coast Guard District Operations Center in New Orleans. A Local Command Post was established at the Coast Guard Station at Grand Isle, Louisiana. With the FBI and DEA providing intelligence, Coast Guard aircraft located the CAPT KURT some 300 miles south of Grand Isle. Using Coast Guard and Customs aircraft, constant surveillance was maintained on the vessel until its arrival off Grand Isle. DEA, Coast Guard and Customs Service boats were pre-positioned to track the suspect vessel. Late in the evening of the 15th of January, the vessel was seized and the people on board were arrested. Later that same evening, a contact boat with three persons onboard, apparently unaware of the interdiction, came alongside the CAPT KURT to begin transferring the load ashore. The vessel was seized and the three people promptly arrested.

In a more recent case, on 15 August 1983, the Coast Guard, acting on intelligence provided by the Customs Service, interdicted the fishing vessel CAPTAIN BUCK with fifteen tons of marijuana and arrested two persons on board. What makes this particular case extraordinary is that the job of locating the vessel by aircraft fell to the Air Force. Under the terms of the recently signed Coast Guard/Air Force Memorandum of Agreement, Air Force resources were requested. Approval of such an action must be made at the Secretary level in the Department of Defense. The response was very timely. An Air Force C-130 aircraft was sent to the probable location of the vessel and pinpointed its position, course, and speed for interdiction by a Coast Guard cutter cruising in the area. This type of support from the Department of Defense made the difference between success and failure in this case. Since the clarifications of the Posse Comitatus Act by Public Law 97-86, the Defense Department has provided the Coast Guard excellent support in drug interdiction. Their assistance is a welcome addition in our fight against the drug smuggler.

In the past several years the drug smuggling problem by vessel in this area appears to have been reduced. I attribute the reduction to the blockade of the Yucatan Pass between Cuba and Mexico, the primary route to Gulf Coast Ports, by the Southeast U.S. Task Force and its successor, the National Narcotics Border Interdiction System, which has forced the maritime smuggler to other areas or other means such as aircraft or overland routes.

That concludes my prepared testimony Mr. Chairman. I am prepared to answer any questions you might have.

Answers to questions raised in Mr. RANGEL's letter to ADM GRACEY dated November 18, 1983:

1. What is the amount of the Coast Guard appropriations assigned to the 8th Coast Guard District for each of fiscal years 1980-1983 and the amount of the 1984 request planned for the region?

ANSWER: Eighth District Operating Expenditures:

FY 1908	\$68,754,399
FY 1981	\$75,718,738
FY 1982	\$89,662,434
FY 1983	\$104,737,875
FY 1984 (planned)	\$115,297,247

NOTE: FY 1984 planned expenditures include an estimated \$60M for salaries and other direct costs to be funded by CGHQ.

2. What are the narcotics threat assessments or other written justifications prepared by the appropriate Coast Guard authorities to support the appropriations and requests for the Eighth Coast Guard District?

ANSWER: Due to the dynamics involved in smuggling today, threat assessments are invalid even as they are published. Some of the factors affecting an assessment are changes in growing conditions, domestic cultivation, demand, and smuggler methods as they react to law enforcement tactics. A detailed narcotics threat assessment was prepared for the Coast Guard by the El Paso Intelligence Center (EPIC) in September 1981. Points that remain pertinent are provided here.

Intelligence reports from Florida suggested that violators were feeling the pressure of increased law enforcement activities directed at maritime smugglers and that some organizations would be moving off-loading operations to areas with less enforcement activity. In conjunction with this, some Florida-based smugglers expressed an interest in shifting part of their operations to various ports along the Louisiana and Texas coasts.

The Texas coast from Port Arthur to Corpus Christi is most suitable for this type of smuggling activity. The coastline south of Corpus Christi, however, is blocked by a natural and continuous land barrier, Padre Island, which stretches past Port Isabel to the southernmost tip of Texas and is therefore, not generally considered attractive for maritime smuggling.

Texas, like most Gulf coastal states, has a long coastline which exceeds 600 miles of tidewater and is fed by many navigable rivers and bays. However, the fact that these ports are roughly 500-600 miles farther from Colombia than Florida (the primary target of smugglers) and that inherent navigational and weather problems precluded effortless operations, forced violators to modify the traditional mothership (coastal freighter) modus operandi. Shrimp boats became the primary contact and mothership vessels destined for the Texas coast and the Colombian islands of Serranilla and Misteriosa emerged as transshipment points.

The shrimp business in Texas produces a sizable yearly catch, with the Freeport area being the most significant port, and the locale was found to be most commonly used by violators for off-loading operations. This industry provides marine smugglers with a multitude of privately-owned docks and marinas throughout the area. In some cases, marina operators and shrimp dock owners have been involved in off-loading schemes.

The Drug Enforcement Agency, Customs Service, and Texas Department of Public Safety have all allocated resources which focus on the maritime smuggling problems Texas is experiencing. Only through continued coordination of these elements and the resultant production of high quality intelligence data submitted to EPIC can the true extent of Texas-based and targeted activity be monitored.

3. What is the total number of Coast Guard personnel for fiscal years 1980-1983 and proposed for 1984 assigned to Maritime Law Enforcement duties in the Eighth Coast Guard District?

ANSWER:

	MULTI- MISSION
4 medium endurance cutters (70 crewmembers each)	280
10 patrol boats (10 crewmembers each)	100
11 stations, each with a complement of about 21 and two or three utility boats	231
Air station New Orleans	113
Air Station Houston	60
Air Station Corpus Christi	88
CCGDEIGHT (oil) staff	3
GULF NNBIS CENTER staff	12
SOUTHWEST NNBIS CENTER staff	3
<hr/> TOTAL	<hr/> 888

From time to time, other resources are deployed that perform some limited law enforcement mission (such as bouy tenders and aids to navigation teams) that are not repeated in the above table. Because of the Coast Guard's multi-mission concept of operations, no units in the Eighth District are fully committed to maritime law enforcement or maritime narcotics interdiction. However, all units and personnel have been assigned the task of drug interdiction utilizing whatever resources they have at their disposal.

4. What is the number of seizures and amounts of heroin, hashish, marijuana, cocaine and other controlled substances taken by the Coast Guard for fiscal years 1980-1983 and 1984 to date in the Eighth Coast Guard District?

ANSWER: Coast Guard maritime narcotics seizures in the Eighth District:

FY 1980	4 vessels 112.5 tons of marijuana 52 arrests
FY 1981	21 vessels 274.0 tons of marijuana 98 arrests
FY 1982	4 vessels 29.0 tons of marijuana 45 kg. (98 lb.) of pure crystal cocaine 1 gallon of hash oil 36 arrests
FY 1983	5 vessels 61.0 tons of marijuana 22 arrests
FY 1984	1 vessel marijuana residue only 8 arrests

The seizures and arrests listed above were all made within the Eighth District either exclusively by Coast Guard units and personnel, or by Coast Guard resources assisted by another agency.

When underway on maritime narcotics interdiction patrol, Eighth District WMEC's invariably, and WPB's occasionally, operate within Seventh District waters under Seventh District control. Much of the fruit of their activity is, therefore, assigned to the statistics generated by the Seventh District.

5. (a) What techniques does the Coast Guard employ to detect and apprehend drug smugglers in the Eighth Coast Guard District?

ANSWER: To avoid compromising the techniques and tactics we use to interdict the maritime narcotics traffic through the Gulf, my policy is to avoid discussing specific tactics or operations or certain cases. Generally speaking, within the Eighth District, Coast Guard units respond to sightings of suspicious vessels and activity; patrol those areas known or suspected to be preferred by maritime narcotics smugglers; and develop and respond to narcotics smuggling intelligence from all sources, especially other law enforcement agencies.

(b) Are the resources available to the Coast Guard in this regard adequate?

ANSWER: Yes. Our resource base is adequate, given the overall national priorities and the availability of funding. The Coast Guard's long term objective is to make maritime narcotics smuggling uneconomical. To reach this level of interdiction requires a coordinated federal effort which addresses all transportation modes and effectively utilizes all available intelligence.

(c) What trends have you observed regarding drug trafficking along the Texas Gulf Coast particularly in the Corpus Christi/Brownsville area over the last three years (1980 to date)?

ANSWER: The Texas gulf coast between Brownsville and Corpus Christi is not as popular with drug smugglers as the Mississippi Delta and Florida panhandle because Texas does not have the maze of bayous and inlets found all along the upper coast. The maritime trafficking activity along the Texas coast appears to have markedly decreased because of the blockade of the Yucatan Channel. We also know from reliable information that coastwise narcotics trafficking exists between Texas and the other states bordering on the Gulf of Mexico.