

PREPARED TESTIMONY
OF
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BEFORE THE
COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT OPERATIONS

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Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee, I am VADM Benedict L. Stabile, Vice Commandant of the Coast Guard. It is a pleasure to appear before you today to provide an update on the Coast Guard's involvement in drug law enforcement.

First, I would like to go briefly over some background on the nature of maritime drug trafficking, and at the same time present current trends that are being noted. Most maritime drug traffic destined for Florida, the Atlantic and Gulf Coast regions of the United States departs from South American or Caribbean staging areas. Marijuana from the Guajira Peninsula on the north coast of Colombia is the prime example. As seaborne smugglers proceed north, they normally pass through one of the four inter-island channels we call "choke points". It is in these areas that Coast Guard resources are most effectively employed. Smugglers successfully transiting these choke points head for the Bahamas, Florida or the Gulf Coast. Some vessels attempt to avoid the increased law enforcement pressure off Florida by transiting the Eastern Caribbean and offloading further north along the Mid-Atlantic or the New England seacoasts. There has also been some increase in drug smuggling on the West Coast, which could be a further reaction to increased enforcement pressure in the Caribbean. We have noted that as law enforcement pressure in the maritime region has increased, there has been a shift to other modes and methods of transportation. There has been a decided increase in airdrop activity, the use of hidden compartments (compartments incorporated into the design of a ship for the express purpose of hiding contraband) and attempts by smugglers to circumnavigate our interdiction resources through counterintelligence and the use of their own surveillance aircraft. We believe these tactics confirm the fact we are having a noticeable effect on maritime smuggling because they make smuggling more difficult and expensive for the trafficker. The operational efforts to stem the overall flow of drugs, therefore, have become increasingly dependent on the coordination of all law enforcement agencies' interdiction and intelligence gathering activities.

Coast Guard drug interdiction operations concentrate on large motherships which deliver contraband to smaller, faster contact boats well offshore. In addition to carrying large quantities of marijuana, our intelligence sources indicate that many carry quantities of hard drugs (primarily cocaine). However, we are seldom able to seize these higher value, low volume, hard drugs because they are usually disposed of "over the side" prior to the at-sea boarding of the vessel. We have observed actions that confirm this. Analysis shows that while we must keep pressure on all facets of the maritime drug scenario, interdiction of motherships has the greatest potential for disrupting the maritime flow of drugs. In addition to removing other contraband (including hard drugs), one mothership seizure may remove as much marijuana from the market as would 10-20 contact boat seizures closer to shore.

Since the mid 1970's the Coast Guard, in cooperation with local, state and other federal enforcement agencies, has increasingly employed its available resources in an attempt to stem the flow of drugs into the United States. Special operations were conducted specifically for narcotics interdiction, and as our experience grew, so did our success rate. The problem, however, continued to outpace efforts.

In the early 80's, the Administration embarked on an aggressive campaign to reduce the availability and use of illicit drugs. A Federal Drug Strategy was developed to set national priorities, clarify agency responsibilities, and establish program goals and objectives for the prevention of drug abuse and drug trafficking. This strategy encompasses five interrelated programs:

- (1) international efforts to stop drugs as close to the source as possible,
- (2) domestic law enforcement, including drug interdiction, and health related activities,
- (3) detoxification treatment,

- (4) education and prevention, and
- (5) research.

The Coast Guard's role falls within the interdiction phase and is directed at illicit maritime traffic of controlled substances.

During the past several years we have significantly increased the number of cutter patrol days devoted to drug interdiction. Our air operations have also been stepped up. In 1982 two large Coast Guard cutters were relocated to Florida from other regions of the United States to increase our ability to respond quickly to sightings and other intelligence. We now average about six of our larger cutters on patrol at all times in waters off the Southeastern United States and in the Caribbean. We have also reprogrammed some of our helicopter assets to make our flight-deck equipped cutters more effective and formed a Surface Effect Ship squadron of three vessels in Key West, which became fully operational in 1983.

In 1982 Congress passed legislation clarifying statutory restrictions on the use of Department of Defense resources for law enforcement purposes. As a result, the Department of Defense now has greater freedom to support federal law enforcement agencies. DOD resources have been playing an important role in the federal drug interdiction program by providing surveillance and support services, such as using aircraft to search for smugglers and Navy ships to tow or escort vessels seized by the Coast Guard to the nearest U. S. port. Additionally, Navy ships have been deploying with Coast Guard Tactical Law Enforcement Teams (TACLETS) or Law Enforcement Detachments (LEDETS) aboard. These teams and detachments conduct boardings of suspect vessels from their Navy hosts in the same manner as they do from Coast Guard vessels. To increase further the number of surface assets available for interdiction, the Coast Guard has been routinely deploying LEDET personnel on Navy Pegasus-class Hydrofoil Patrol Boats operating out of Key West. These hydrofoils are being used as "pouncer" vessels to interdict fast drug smuggling contact boats. As of the end of June the DOD has been involved in 23 vessel seizures.

New and more capable resources are becoming available to the Coast Guard. These resources will be brought to bear on the drug trafficking problem as quickly as possible. Our air reconnaissance capability has increased considerably with the receipt of 41 new twin-jet Falcon medium range search aircraft. The first of six AIREYE systems for our Falcon aircraft has just started flight testing at the contractor's facility in Ontario, CA. This sensor package will greatly extend the Falcon's search and detection effectiveness in both daylight and darkness. New radars are being procured for our fixed wing aircraft. We will replace our fleet of HH-52 short range helicopters with the more capable HH-65 helicopters as they become operationally available. These new ship-deployable helicopters will markedly improve our at-sea surveillance capabilities because of their higher speed and modern sensors (including FLIR (Forward Looking Infra-Red)). Sixteen new patrol boats are being purchased to help our drug interdiction efforts in the Southeast United States and Caribbean. Some of our older cutters are being replaced with thirteen new 270 foot medium endurance "Bear" class cutters which are helo capable. The remaining fleet will continue to be renovated, modernized, or replaced as necessary to insure they remain safe and productive.

Our research and development program has been looking into other tools. For example, we are evaluating aerostat-borne radars. This technology consists of a small, 25,000 cubic foot balloon equipped with a surface search radar tethered to a 194-foot offshore supply type vessel (support ship). The aerostat lifts the radar to a sufficient altitude to greatly increase its range. This aerostat platform is part of a coordinated operation, passing the surface target information it acquires to a command and control cutter for evaluation and deployment of other assigned units, both surface and air. The system recently completed an initial evaluation and is currently under an extended redeployment.

The draft report on the initial phase of this evaluation just arrived and is under review. The results of this test have been very promising. The

continuous large area radar coverage possible with this system can significantly enhance our law enforcement efforts. Our specific mission objective is to make better use of available resources by reducing the ship and aircraft time devoted to the search phase of the maritime interdiction process, thus freeing cutters for contact intercept, identification, and boarding. During the initial aerostat evaluation, cutters and aircraft were accurately vectored to identify more targets of interest than has previously been possible. Prior to the aerostat, our ability to search large areas was limited severely by the number of ships we could assign simultaneously to a given pass, or by the on-scene endurance of assigned search aircraft. Aerostat eases these constraints by providing a tool that easily searches huge areas for prolonged periods of time. Preliminary test results show aerostats can be effectively used as force multipliers, allowing our ships to be used for target intercepts and boardings, rather than for lengthy searches. Our search aircraft are likewise freed to perform other missions heretofore impossible to accomplish. As conceived, Aerostat will be used as part of a Mobile Interdiction Surveillance Team (MIST), which includes a helo equipped medium or high endurance cutter acting as Command and Control and at least one other chase craft. Aerostat will not replace our cutters and aircraft. However, it does allow us to use them much more effectively.

Some trends in drug trafficking have been noticeable over the past few years. In Calendar Year 1982 the Coast Guard seized 174 vessels carrying over 3.4M pounds of marijuana. During 1983 our units seized 164 vessels carrying 2.3M pounds of marijuana. This drop in the amount seized has led to speculation that we have apparently turned the corner on maritime narcotics smuggling. The drop noticed last year might be the result of a poor growing season which sharply limited production. These conditions did not recur this year, and indications are the present crop has returned to levels seen in the past. Recent seizure statistics confirm a resurgence in smuggling activity. While the trend seems to be returning to the higher levels of seizures experienced in the past, it is still too early to draw firm conclusions.

We are also seeing two other trends which may signal further evolution in methods of smuggling. The use of secret compartments in motherships had increased dramatically during the last 18 months but appears to have peaked out recently and may be declining. Perhaps our success in discovering them has convinced the smuggling community the price of converting vessels, and the resulting decrease in their cargo-carrying capacity, is not worth the investment. We have also noticed an increase in airdrops where large transport aircraft drop bales to fast contact boats hovering in the waters of the Western Bahamas. The speed and unpredictability of these operations make them extremely difficult to counter.

Better intelligence remains the key to combating these methods of delivery and is an important factor in increasing our overall interdiction effectiveness. Our most critical need is timely and accurate information on the number, identity, location and destination of vessels and aircraft bound for the U.S. carrying contraband. During the past year improvements have been made in the collection, evaluation, and dissemination of intelligence. We have recently expanded Coast Guard intelligence activities by increasing our ability to process information from Coast Guard, other federal agencies, and national intelligence community sources. We are also continuing our liaison with the law enforcement community's intelligence network. Only through the melding of all these available sources of intelligence can we efficiently locate, track, identify and interdict smugglers.

Along with expanding our intelligence collection programs, we have developed a staff of trained personnel to exploit this information and ensure its timely flow to our operational commanders. We are establishing an intelligence coordination center here in Washington, D.C. to accomplish this. When fully operational, this center will maintain a 24-hour all-source intelligence watch to exploit all intelligence systems available to the Coast Guard. Although the center is still under construction, it is already producing intelligence products tailored to the needs of our operational commanders. Our Area Commanders' staffs have also been expanded by adding additional intelligence-trained personnel. These staffs in New York and San Francisco function as

clearing houses that ensure the timely dissemination of information to our field commanders as well as to other law enforcement agencies.

Part of our improvements in the intelligence area have come about due to our active participation in the National Narcotics Border Interdiction System (NNBIS), the Attorney General's Organized Crime Drug Enforcement Task Forces (OCDETFs) and other ongoing initiatives.

The Coast Guard has been involved since the very beginning of the OCDETF program. Our Chief of Operations is a member of the OCDETF Working Group, and has participated in the decision-making processes which have defined the program. We have also provided agency coordinators to 11 of the existing 12 task forces, and one of our officers will serve as Coast Guard agency coordinator for the Miami OCDETF when it forms later this year. These agency coordinators vary in background and types of skills based on the specific needs expressed by the U. S. Attorneys heading each OCDETF. In addition to assisting in the investigation of the cases being targeted by the OCDETFs and coordinating requests for additional Coast Guard assistance, our coordinators have the opportunity to evaluate these cases for useful intelligence that, in turn, can generate additional interdictions.

Our involvement in NNBIS likewise dates back to the earliest days of the program. As I am sure you are aware, Secretary Dole is a member of the NNBIS Executive Board, and Admiral Gracey serves as a member of the Coordination Board. Three of the six NNBIS Regional Coordinators are Coast Guard officers who also command the Coast Guard District primarily involved. Additionally, the Director of the NNBIS Staff at the White House is a Coast Guard officer. We are very pleased with the results of NNBIS to date. It has provided us with a new forum for requesting assistance from other sources and agencies, and has also proven to be a valuable mechanism to facilitate the collection of intelligence previously unavailable to us.

We are currently participating in another major initiative. Under the NNBIS Coordination Board a Joint Surveillance Committee (JSC) has been formed to

consider, on an interagency basis, the national capability to provide surveillance and detection of inbound narcotics smugglers. The committee will also identify steps to be taken to improve capabilities. To provide the necessary input, six working groups have been formed:

- Trafficking Patterns Group (Chaired by DEA)
- Detection Capabilities Group (Chaired by DOD)
- Deterrence Capabilities Group (Chaired by FAA)
- Reaction Capabilities Group (Chaired by Customs)
- Strategy and Reporting Group (Chaired by NNBS)
- 3A Evaluation Group (Chaired by Customs)

In addition to these major initiatives, we work and cooperate closely with the other federal agencies on a continuous basis. Interdiction efforts cannot be focused in one or two agencies since drug traffickers exploit all modes of transportation and possess vast numbers of resources within their vast crime organizations. To combat the problem, coordinated efforts and active participation at regular meetings among all agencies are required to make effective use of all federal law enforcement resources.

This concludes my prepared testimony, Mr. Chairman. I will be happy to answer any questions you or the members of the committee may have.