

STATEMENT OF
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COMMANDER, FIRST COAST GUARD DISTRICT

BEFORE THE
HOUSE SELECT COMMITTEE ON
NARCOTICS ABUSE AND CONTROL

SEPTEMBER 20, 1985

Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee, I am COMMODORE Robert L. JOHANSON, Commander of the First Coast Guard District. I am pleased to appear before you today as a member of this panel to discuss the Coast Guard's efforts to control maritime narcotics trafficking in New England.

The First Coast Guard District includes the coastal states of Rhode Island, Massachusetts, New Hampshire and Maine, as well as a common border with Canada. Over 85,000 square miles of the western North Atlantic Ocean also fall within my district. We have 22 cutters ranging in size from 82 feet to 378 feet, 21 small boat stations, 3 marine safety offices and a major air station at Cape Cod. These are multi-mission units performing maritime safety, defense readiness and law enforcement functions. Our maritime narcotics interdiction efforts focus on vessels carrying all narcotics; however, marijuana has been the only narcotic seized by the Coast Guard in this district.

As you know, nearly all maritime drug smuggling efforts into the U.S. originate from staging areas in the Caribbean, with Colombia being the principal source country. Seaborne smugglers have traditionally chosen the shortest routes to the United States, normally passing through one of the inter-island channels we call "choke points" between Mexico, Cuba, Hispaniola and Puerto Rico. They then attempt to land their contraband cargos in the coastal areas of the southern United States. Coast Guard interdiction successes in these "choke points", most notably following establishment of the South Florida Task Force in 1982, substantially increased the amount of maritime smuggling of marijuana here in New England. The magnitude of this impact is indicated by the graph, enclosure (1), of annual maritime marijuana seizures and the summary of statistics, enclosure (2). In Calendar Year 1981 six vessels and nearly 57,000 pounds of marijuana were seized in New England waters. In the eight months of Calendar Year 1982 following establishment of the South Florida Task Force, the Coast Guard, at sea or assisting other law enforcement agencies at the dock, seized more than 164,000 pounds of marijuana off just four vessels. An additional 137,000 pounds and five vessels were seized in Calendar Year 1983. While it is reasonable to assume that cocaine is being smuggled by vessels into New England, we have yet to seize any cocaine. This is largely attributed to the ease of concealing cocaine. The marijuana seizure statistics suggest a trend by many maritime smugglers away from what they perceived to be a high risk area in the Southeastern U.S. to what they believed to be an area of less risk here in New England.

New England has a history of maritime smuggling that predates the American Revolution. In fact, some of the smuggling tactics we are seeing today are simply updates of those encountered by earlier Coastguardsmen in dealing with smugglers during the Prohibition era. New England's 6,100 miles of rugged coastline dotted with remote harbors, its large population and its existing criminal infrastructure for coordination and distribution combine to make this area a very appealing target for maritime narcotics traffickers.

Tactics used by New England narcotics smugglers are quite similar to those encountered in the Southeastern United States except that, because of the less favorable weather and longer transits involved, smuggling vessels and their marijuana cargos are usually larger. The average drug boat seized in the Southeast carried around five tons of marijuana whereas boats seized in New England over the past five years have averaged over ten tons of marijuana cargo.

Traditional "mothership" type freighters standing offshore and transferring their cargos to domestic fishing vessels have accounted for two thirds of the marijuana tonnage we have seized between 1981 and 1985. These fishing vessels, acting as "pick up" boats, then attempt to blend in and enter port with our large population of legitimate commercial fishing vessels. We've also had three domestic fishing vessels load contraband cargos in Caribbean ports and attempt to deliver them directly to the port of New Bedford. These attempts involved quite sophisticated efforts to conceal the contraband. Sailboats are occasionally encountered during the summer months, although they account for a very small portion of marijuana being smuggled.

The Coast Guard's maritime law enforcement strategy here in New England has been built around random cutter and aircraft patrols, an aggressive boarding program and development of intelligence to the fullest. In Fiscal Year 1984 our patrol boats and utility boats conducted over 15,700 hours of law enforcement patrol in New England coastal waters, boarding 5,591 vessels. Our aircraft, most notably the five new twin-jet Falcon medium range search aircraft based at Cape Cod, flew almost 1,700 hours of law enforcement surveillance. For the first three quarters of Fiscal Year 1985, we've already patrolled 12,700 hours and boarded 2,600 vessels. Our Falcons have flown nearly 1,400 hours of surveillance in the same three quarters. U.S. Navy P-3 anti-submarine warfare aircraft from Naval Air Stations at Brunswick, Maine and South Weymouth, Massachusetts also conduct eight hour law enforcement surveillance flights an average of ten times per month in offshore waters approaching the New England coast.

Coast Guard boardings are, of course, for the purpose of verifying compliance with all applicable U.S. laws and regulations. Here in New England, our boardings focus on both the detection of narcotics smuggling and the enforcement of those provisions of the Magnuson Fisheries Conservation and Management Act that can only be enforced at sea. The overall objectives of our boarding program are to detect violations of the law and to deter anyone who might be experiencing economic problems from succumbing to the lure of big money associated with drug smuggling. While we initially encountered some complaints in 1982 and 1983 from legitimate waterway users, they have come to accept Coast Guard boardings as the only viable way to detect maritime narcotics traffickers.

Perhaps the most heartening aspect of the maritime narcotics interdiction effort here in New England has been the unprecedented level of cooperation and intelligence exchange between law enforcement agencies. At the national level we receive information through the National Narcotics Border Interdiction System (NNBIS), the El Paso Intelligence Center (EPIC) and the Coast Guard's own Intelligence Coordination Center (ICC). At the regional level we not only exchange information between members of the Federal family represented in this panel, but also with state and local law enforcement agencies. Last month I had the pleasure of presenting the Coast Guard Meritorious Public Service Award to Lieutenant Robert PELADEAU of the Fall River, Massachusetts Police Department. As Coordinator of the Bristol County Drug Task Force, Lieutenant PELADEAU attained a level of federal, state and local cooperative effort that has disrupted maritime smuggling into southern Massachusetts. The various local task forces that the Coast Guard participates in, ranging from highly organized to relatively informal, provide a valuable supplement to intelligence information developed at the national level.

We have also conducted seven very successful coordinated operations with the Drug Enforcement Administration, the Customs Service and state and local police jurisdictions leading to dockside seizures in what we call "controlled offloads". Referring again to the enclosed graph of pounds of marijuana seized, in enclosure (1), you see that it is broken down into pounds seized by the Coast Guard at sea and pounds seized where the Coast Guard assisted in joint operations. Joint seizures, normally conducted at the dock, often yield far more than a boat, some marijuana and a crew of foreign nationals. U.S. citizens participating in the offload crews can provide the crack in the door that leads to the identification and prosecution of the so called "kingpins" who organize these smugglers. The New England Organized Crime Drug Enforcement Task Force, of which the Coast Guard is a member, has an excellent record of prosecuting top level narcotics traffickers based on initial information developed from seemingly unrelated maritime narcotics smuggling seizures.

At this point I'd like to address the obvious question posed by the graph of marijuana seizures. "Why have Coast Guard New England drug seizures fallen in the past two years while assistance cases have grown so dramatically?" Law enforcement pressure the last few years has forced smugglers to become much more sophisticated. This is best shown by the recent seizure cases involving the M/V RAMSLAND and the F/V FATUK. The RAMSLAND, a 213 foot freighter claiming British registry, was sighted by a Coast Guard aircraft and boarded by one of our patrol boats off Boston harbor in November, 1984. The crew of six claimed the vessel was coming from the Azores to Boston for repairs. The boarding officer was suspicious, but the search was frustrated by a cargo hold filled with gravel. The RAMSLAND was docked at the Coast Guard Support Center in Boston where a joint Coast Guard and Customs search team conducted an exhaustive search of the vessel with a drug-sniffing dog alerting to contraband. The search finally required placing two small bulldozers in the cargo hold to move the load of gravel. When the search team finally cleared away six feet of gravel, they discovered thirty-six tons of marijuana concealed in the double bottom voids.

The 180 foot F/V FATUK, flying a Panamanian flag, was likewise sighted by a Coast Guard aircraft and boarded by a patrol boat south of Newport, Rhode Island, in February of this year. The FATUK was carrying 40 tons of frozen shark carcasses from Venezuela to Providence. Another follow-up dockside search by a Coast Guard and Customs team revealed twenty-six tons of marijuana hidden beneath the cargo of shark.

These two recent cases point up several factors. First, smugglers are now going to great lengths to make their vessels and voyages appear legitimate and to conceal their contraband cargos so they cannot be easily detected by boarding parties at sea. Second, more smuggling voyages appear to be originating from ports other than traditional Caribbean source countries. The RAMSLAND's voyage originated from the Canary Islands and the FATUK's from Puerto Cabello, Venezuela. While this adds significantly to the smugglers' cost of transporting their product, it also makes detection far more challenging.

In my district, as in the Seventh Coast Guard District, the successful interdiction of narcotics traffickers involves the coordinated efforts of all

law enforcement forces and constant reevaluation of our interdiction strategies. It also requires that we make full use of available technology in support of interdiction. As examples, the First Coast Guard District just recently completed installation of voice privacy radios so that our patrol boats and utility boats can communicate with their operational commanders without disclosing their locations or intentions to unauthorized listeners. Our four group operations centers also have direct computer access to Operational Intelligence and Boarding History files. Using the voice privacy capability, they can quickly and securely provide a wide range of information about any vessel one of our patrol boats is considering boarding. This capability has increased both the safety and effectiveness of our boardings.

I'm not so naive as to believe that we are driving maritime narcotics traffickers away from New England's shores yet, but I feel we are convincing them that smuggling into New England is as risky as it is in the Southeastern United States and our combined, cooperative efforts are having an effect. The sophisticated tactics being used by the traffickers and the price increase from \$35.00 to \$85.00 per ounce that DEA is reporting in New England do suggest that we are experiencing some measure of success. At the same time, we've learned that we cannot depend on yesterday's successful tactics to work tomorrow. It is the ongoing challenge for all of us engaged in narcotics law enforcement to anticipate and respond to new smuggling threats with innovative strategies of our own. I am confident that the professional skills and continued cooperative efforts of federal, state and local law enforcement personnel here in New England will permit us to continue to meet this challenge.

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

First District Marijuana Seizures: 1981 - 1985 (8/31/85)

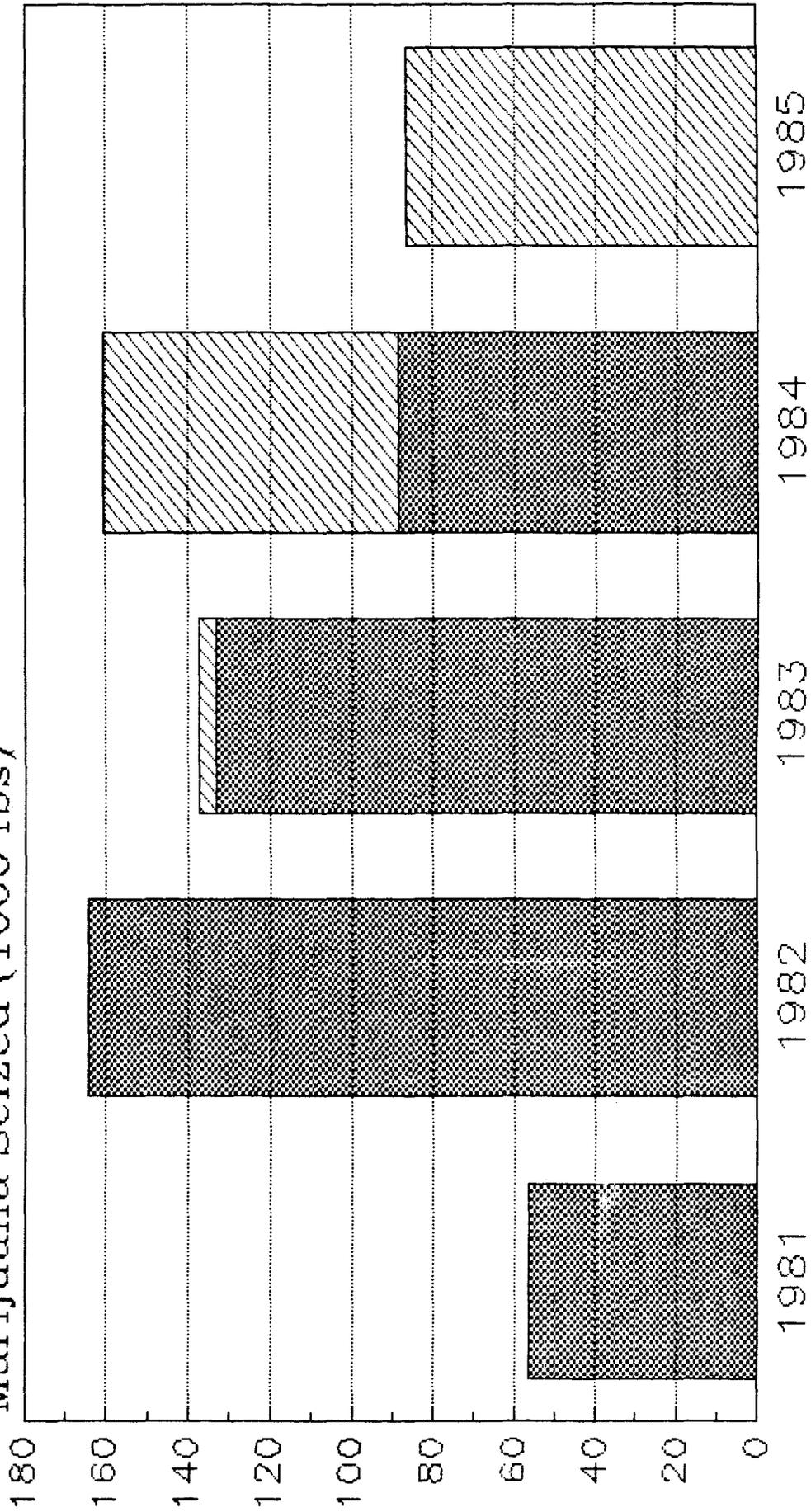
CG ASSISTING ANOTHER AGENCY



CG PRIMARY SEIZING AGENCY



Marijuana Seized (1000 lbs)



Calendar Year

U.S. COAST GUARD DRUG INTERDICTION
INCLUDING ASSISTANCE TO OTHER AGENCIES
from 1 JAN 81 to 31 AUG 85

CALENDAR YEAR	<u>AMOUNT(NUMBER)</u>					<u>TOTAL</u>
	<u>1981</u>	<u>1982</u>	<u>1983</u>	<u>1984</u>	<u>1985(8/31/85)</u>	
CASES	195	266	288	417	239	1,405
VESSELS	167	201	191	255	143	957
ARRESTS	803	1076	881	1,038	567	4,365
MARIJUANA LBS	2,827,033 (191)	3,719,848 (260)	2,540,928 (284)	2,771,022 (405)	1,377,061 (221)	13,235,892 (1361)
COCAINE LBS	136 (2)	837 (8)	1,046 (4)	2,041 (11)	6,103 (14)	10,164 (39)
HASHISH LBS	34,580 (1)	18 (1)	29,962 (3)	1 (1)		64,561 (6)
HASHISH OIL GALS	7 (1)		10 (2)	18 (2)		35 (5)
THAI STICK LBS				16,001 (2)		16,001 (2)
DANGEROUS DRUGS DOSES	7,996,009 (6)	61,628 (1)	100 (1)		1 (1)	8,057,738 (9)
HEROIN LBS	0 (1)			3 (2)		3 (3)

Note: All weights rounded to nearest pound.

U.S. COAST GUARD DISTRICT ONE
(NORTHERN NEW ENGLAND) DRUG INTERDICTION
INCLUDING ASSISTANCE TO OTHER AGENCIES
from 1 JAN 81 to 31 AUG 85

CALENDAR YEAR	<u>AMOUNT(NUMBER)</u>					<u>TOTAL</u>
	<u>1981</u>	<u>1982</u>	<u>1983</u>	<u>1984</u>	<u>1985(8/31/85)</u>	
CASES	7	4	6	3	3	23
VESSELS	6	4	5	3	2	20
ARRESTS	18	22	36	26	13	115
MARIJUANA LBS	56,577 (7)	164,400 (4)	137,000 (6)	160,520 (3)	86,340 (3)	604,837 (23)

Note: All weights rounded to nearest pound.

ENCLOSURE(2)