

U.S. Department
of Transportation

**United States
Coast Guard**



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United States Coast Guard

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STATEMENT OF
CAPTAIN TERRY LUCAS
CHIEF OF STAFF, ELEVENTH COAST GUARD DISTRICT
TO THE
HOUSE SELECT COMMITTEE ON
NARCOTICS ABUSE AND CONTROL

OCTOBER 31, 1986

Mr. Chairman, members of the Committee, I am Captain Terry Lucas, Chief of Staff of the Eleventh Coast Guard District. I am here today representing Rear Admiral A. Bruce Beran, the Commander of the Eleventh Coast Guard District. The Eleventh Coast Guard District, whose offices are in Long Beach, encompasses the coast of southern California from the Mexican border on the south to approximately sixty miles north of Santa Barbara, CA. Rear Admiral Beran also serves as the Pacific Region Coordinator for the Vice President's National Narcotics Border Interdiction System (NNBIS). I am pleased to appear here today before your Committee.

As you are well aware, the use of illegal drugs presents a serious threat to American society. The Coast Guard, as the primary Federal maritime law enforcement agency, has a responsibility to counter the flow of illegal drugs into the United States from the maritime region. Our resources within the Eleventh District include a two hundred ten foot Medium Endurance Cutter, a one hundred eighty foot seagoing buoy tender, nine eighty-two foot patrol boats, six forty-one foot utility boats, three thirty-two foot Ports and Waterways boats, three HU-25 Falcon jet Medium Range Search aircraft, three HH-65 Short Range Recovery helicopters, four HH-52 Short Range Recovery helicopters, and several other small boats designed for various purposes. All of these units are used in our law enforcement efforts. Additionally, Coast Guard law enforcement teams frequently deploy on board U. S. Navy ships transitting the Southern Californian and Mexican coasts.

Construction recently began at Coast Guard Base Terminal Island to provide accommodations for four new two hundred seventy foot Medium Endurance Cutters. These modern ships, whose primary duty will be law enforcement, will be phased into the Eleventh District fleet over the next several years and will be a welcome addition.

The drug smuggling threat in Southern California is much different from that found in other areas of the United States. The geography of the West Coast presents us with many problems. Large portions of the coast are remote and sparsely populated, while busy commercial harbors exist in other areas. Unlike the Caribbean, no natural "choke points" exist through which a potential smuggler must pass, and in which a Coast Guard unit may efficiently patrol. Over two thousand miles of open ocean lie between Hawaii and the mainland. We are confronted with illegal substances coming from both Central and South America to the south, and Southeast Asia to the west. Contraband encountered has included marijuana from Thailand, marijuana and cocaine from Colombia, and marijuana and heroin from Mexico. We have an ongoing effort to improve cooperative efforts with the Mexican Navy to prevent Mexican territorial waters from being used by smugglers as a safe haven. The only factor which operates in our favor to prevent the entry of illegal drugs is distance: a vessel originating from the Pacific coast of Colombia must travel over three times further than its Atlantic counterpart to reach a destination in the United States. The additional cost required for the longer trip has become less of a deterrent, however, as more successful interdiction efforts in the Caribbean have increased the cost of doing business there.

Drug smugglers' tactics have included bringing fast, small boats onto secluded beaches, using pleasure craft to blend into the enormous recreational boating fleet, secreting contraband on board large merchant ships, and hiding it within shipping containers. There have been indications that vessels

containing large amounts of drugs transit the coast over four hundred miles off-shore. These vessels then rendezvous with smaller boats which bring the contraband into the U.S.

We have found that West Coast smuggling rings are extremely well organized, tightly controlled, and well equipped. Cases have been documented, with organizations such as that headed by convicted smuggler Bruce Perlowin, in which smugglers have moved their operations to the West Coast due to their perceptions that less competition exists and the area is wide open. We are doing our best to ensure that any such movement is unsuccessful.

We are hampered, however, by a lack of intelligence on which we can base our efforts. We are unable to accurately determine the extent of the problem. Street supplies of illicit drugs remain at high levels, as levels of purity increase and prices decrease. Although Eleventh Coast Guard District units boarded over one thousand vessels during the past year, actual drugs seized have been sparse. Fruitful interdiction results mainly when our efforts have been coordinated with investigations conducted by the Drug Enforcement Administration, U.S. Customs Service, and state and local law enforcement agencies. For example, the motor vessel LINE ISLAND TRADER was brought into Long Beach in April of this year following its apprehension on the high seas with ten thousand pounds of high-grade Thai marijuana. The seizure occurred as a result of a prolonged investigation conducted by U.S. Customs. The marijuana was hidden inside empty fuel tanks, and would have been extremely difficult to discover without the prior knowledge that it was on board. Another successful case involved the container ship MERKUR BEACH in May of this year. As a result of information developed from a crewman, one hundred fifty-six pounds of cocaine were found during a search conducted by Coast Guard, Customs, and Drug Enforcement Administration personnel. The cocaine, wrapped in plastic, was hidden inside an oil tank located beneath the deck plates in the engine room. It was necessary to remove thirty bolts to gain access to the tank. Again, this contraband would probably have entered the United States if specific intelligence was not available. By expanding this type of cooperation among all the agencies involved, we will have a pronounced impact on the smuggling trade.

Toward this end, Coast Guard Special Agents are assigned to work closely with representatives of other agencies, and currently share offices with the Drug Enforcement Administration in San Diego and Santa Barbara. Coast Guard representatives are on the Organized Crime Drug Enforcement Task Forces in San Diego and Los Angeles, and we also participate in a task force involving local and county authorities in the Los Angeles area. Our involvement in this latter task force, named Operation Pacific, led to the seizure of two vessels and ten tons of marijuana in May of 1985. While under surveillance by task force personnel, the fishing vessel OCEAN JOY off-loaded its cargo of marijuana to the vessel GARY LIN alongside a bait barge within Los Angeles Harbor. The GARY LIN was seized after it continued into the harbor, and the OCEAN JOY was seized the following day. The Coast Guard cutter on scene was required to fire warning shots after the vessel refused to stop, and an outstanding damage control effort from the Navy destroyer USS KINCAID made the smugglers' attempt at scuttling futile.

Progress is also being made in other areas. Steps have been taken toward the development of a better working relationship with the Mexican authorities.

Coast Guard cutters have made calls in the Mexican ports of Ensenada, La Paz, Guaymas, Puerto Vallarta, Acapulco, and Mazatlan with the specific objective of creating personal contacts with our counterparts in the Mexican Navy. Rear Admiral Beran will be meeting with commanders of West Coast Mexican Naval Zones in Acapulco and La Paz during the next month. Steps such as these have achieved results on the East Coast, and have led to seizures, by Mexican authorities, of vessels which entered Mexican waters in an attempt to evade the Coast Guard. Extended operations such as Hat Trick I and II have also projected the Coast Guard presence to the shores of countries which have been the traditional sources of illicit narcotics.

As previously mentioned, Coast Guard Tactical Law Enforcement Teams or TACLETs frequently deploy on board U.S. Navy ships. During the past fiscal year, TACLET personnel conducted over sixty boardings. Navy aircraft are frequently used, in cooperation with Coast Guard aircraft, to patrol the approaches to Southern California. A Coast Guard helicopter deployed on board the USS PIGEON during operations in the San Diego area and during an extended transit along the coast. A recently concluded operation in the San Diego area utilized a Navy small boat unit and associated equipment. This same operation included participation from U.S. Customs Service and the Immigration and Naturalization Service.

The law enforcement role of the Coast Guard Reserve has expanded significantly. Within the Eleventh District, reservists augment the active-duty law enforcement units on a frequent basis. On many occasions, reservists have been able to use law enforcement expertise gained from their civilian occupations to improve the training level of their active-duty counterparts. A Coast Guard Reserve unit has recently begun operating a Navy eighty-two foot patrol boat in the Channel Islands area, and reservists have been trained as intelligence analysts to assist in the National Narcotics Border Interdiction System Center. Additionally, we are currently discussing the use of Coast Guard reservists to augment U.S. Custom's Contraband Enforcement Teams operating in Long Beach and Los Angeles Harbor.

The Eleventh Coast Guard District is strongly committed to the prevention of smuggling of illegal drugs. I hope that our efforts will play a significant role in stopping this threat to the United States. This concludes my statement, Mr. Chairman, and I will be happy to answer any questions which you or the members of the Committee may have.