

PREPARED STATEMENT
OF
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BEFORE THE
HOUSE COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS

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Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee, I am RADM Clyde E. Robbins, Chief, Office of Operations of the Coast Guard. It is a pleasure to appear before you today to provide an overview on the Coast Guard's role in international drug law enforcement.

First, I would like to briefly review some background on the nature of maritime drug trafficking, and note current trends. Finally, I will review our law enforcement mission and its future outlook.

As you know, 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 a prime example. As seaborne smugglers proceed north, they normally pass through one of the four inter-island channels we call "choke points" enroute toward 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 a substantial increase in drug smuggling on the West Coast. Marijuana from Central and South America is most prevalent, which could be a further reaction to increased enforcement pressure in the Caribbean, and other narcotic drugs are coming from Asia.

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. In 1984 there was a decided increase in airdrop activity to boats off our coast, 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. In 1985 these activities decreased somewhat, and several attempts were made to use tugs towing barges with massive loads of marijuana. After we seized a few of these tug and barge combinations, this activity decreased also. We believe these tactics confirm the fact that we are having a noticeable effect on maritime smuggling because they make smuggling more difficult and expensive for the traffickers as they attempt to find alternate means to continue their illicit trade.

Analysis shows that while we must keep pressure on all facets of the maritime drug scenario, interdiction of "motherships", which deliver contraband to smaller, faster contact boats well off our coast, has the greatest potential for disrupting the maritime flow of drugs. In addition to removing other contraband, one mothership seizure may remove as much marijuana from the market as would 10-20 contact boat seizures closer to shore. Coast Guard drug interdiction operations have, therefore, continued to concentrate on these large motherships. In addition to larger quantities of marijuana, large quantities of cocaine and some other drugs have begun to be seized ... a

distinct shift in trafficking trends. Previously, we rarely seized these higher value, low volume, drugs because they were usually disposed of "over the side" prior to the at-sea boarding of the vessel. In 1985, however, we seized over 6,500 pounds of cocaine, up from the 1,967 pounds seized in 1984, and well above the high of 46 pounds in previous years.

Effective maritime drug law enforcement requires making the smuggling of narcotics substantially less profitable by achieving any combination of:

- greatly increasing the seizure rate;
- denying the use of traditional maritime trafficking routes, thus enhancing source country eradication and seizure efforts;
- forcing the smugglers into using more vulnerable methods/routes in order to increase the chance of detection; and,
- forcing the smugglers into shipping smaller loads via aircraft or secret compartments in vessels.

As I have stated, the Coast Guard's drug interdiction strategy has been mainly directed toward intercepting motherships as they transit the Caribbean choke points; however, there were major problems associated with this strategy. To effect this "choke point" strategy, the Coast Guard conducted continuous surface patrols and frequent surveillance flights over the waters of interest, and an intense program of boarding and inspecting vessels at sea. Major resources were concentrated in the choke points with emphasis on the Yucatan Channel between Mexico and Cuba and the Windward Passage between Cuba and Haiti. Cutters also patrolled elsewhere as available, such as the Bahamas, Eastern Passes of the Caribbean, and the Gulf and Atlantic and Pacific coastal areas. The amount of contraband seized remained fairly level, however, despite our stepped up efforts and increased vessel seizures. That strategy did not allow the flexibility to vacate the choke points in order to seek out drug traffickers close to the source of their cargo or concentrate forces in other areas of heavy traffic. Thus, our forces were kept in a "defensive" rather than "offensive" mode. Additionally, the smugglers knew the pattern of operations and employed spotter aircraft to keep track of cutters stationed in the choke points.

Some changes impacting on interdiction methods occurred in late 1984 and early 1985. First, our foreign allies began to realize the impact of drug trafficking upon the national security of many nations, including their own. The United Nations International Narcotics Control Board annual report issued in January, 1985, stated that worldwide drug abuse and related crimes reached unprecedented proportions the preceding year, to the point of posing a threat to the security of some nations. It was realized that the demand for drugs is widespread; not solely a U.S. problem, but global in nature. Producer nations were falling prey to their own narcotics, and their people were becoming users.

Second, starting in the fall of 1984, a new strategy was employed, facilitated by this new awareness of the international ramifications of drug trafficking. Operation Wagonwheel, conducted in November and December, 1984, was the key element of a larger national and international operation, Operation Hat Trick, coordinated by the National Narcotics Border Interdiction System (NNBIS). The latter involved other U.S. law enforcement agencies, other U.S. armed forces and foreign governments. Operation Wagonwheel employed a strategy that was markedly different. Substantial forces were massed in the Southeast with extensive operations in the southern Caribbean. The major choke points (Yucatan Channel and Windward Passage) were covered by a reduced number of cutters. As the operation progressed, ships and aircraft were deployed close to the territorial sea of Colombia. Those forces employed the maximum of flexibility and deception complementing the anti-drug operations being carried out by Colombian forces ashore and afloat.

During the first month of the operation (November), a higher than usual quantity of marijuana was seized (as compared with previous November seizures). The traffickers were active. When the smugglers became aware of the fact that a sizable interdiction force was operating in the southern Caribbean, a deliberate effort was made to delay trafficking until the operation ended. Seizures dropped to a very low level in December, 1984, and January, 1985. Given the thorough coverage off the Guajira Peninsula, it is considered unlikely the low seizures meant an increased amount of marijuana was getting through, but rather that the operation effectively shut down maritime trafficking from the north coast of South America. Stockpiles ashore, therefore, suffered severe losses due to shelf-life problems and Colombian in-country seizure efforts.

Operation Blue Lightning, also coordinated by NNBIS, was another major offensive action against the trafficking organizations. During two weeks in April, 1985, the Coast Guard participated in this operation, a coordinated law enforcement effort between the Government of the Bahamas and the United States. Its goals were to disrupt the primary maritime smuggling routes through the Bahamas, destroy cached contraband and facilities on various islands throughout the Bahamas, and intercept those smugglers approaching the Florida coast who had been "flushed out" by the pressure in the Bahamas. The operation was so successful that a member of the Royal Bahamian Defense Force has continued riding Coast Guard cutters operating near Bahamian waters on nearly a continuous basis since the operation. This relentless pressure in the Bahamas has caused an increase in the seizure of traffickers off the west coast of Florida, as traffickers tried to find alternate means of trafficking into Florida.

Operation Hat Trick II is a current operation very similar to Hat Trick I, but on a more massive scale. Again planned and coordinated through NNBIS, the U.S. Navy and Coast Guard are providing the primary maritime surveillance and interdiction forces, while the Customs Service, Navy, Air Force, Army and Marines are conducting air operations. Through the Department of State and Drug Enforcement Administration initiatives, the federal agencies are working with our neighbors and allies, primarily Colombia, Panama, Venezuela, Jamaica and the Bahamas, to provide the maximum coordination of their own anti-drug programs with our cooperation.

The successes of the Hat Trick and Blue Lightning operations point out the advantage of periodic offensive tactics against trafficking organizations. Additionally, they point out the value of foreign assistance in combatting a problem affecting us all. International cooperation is the cornerstone of a successful narcotics control program. Such cooperation exemplifies the "SPIRIT OF QUITO" - a term coined at the meeting among several leaders of the Western Hemisphere in Ecuador in August, 1984. It is a vital commitment for wiping out this disease which threatens all our societies. One nation cannot accomplish the task alone.

An area of international importance, especially to us in the Coast Guard, is the "Mansfield Amendment". Prior to, and especially during the international operations I've just touched on, the Coast Guard often received requests for operational assistance. Many of the smaller countries in the Antilles have established their own coast guards and have requested our assistance in law enforcement operations and training. The Mansfield Amendment has been interpreted by our Chief Counsel as allowing the Coast Guard to act alone within foreign waters, with the consent of the foreign sovereign, to enforce U.S. law; but the Coast Guard can not DIRECTLY assist foreign personnel in the enforcement of their or our own law. With these restrictions, any operations or hands-on training in foreign territorial waters have to be carefully conducted to avoid any direct involvement in their drug law enforcement cases.

Section 605 of the International Security and Development Cooperation Act of 1985, recently amended the Mansfield Amendment, which lifted Mansfield Amendment restrictions on drug law enforcement in foreign countries WHEN the foreign country and the Department of State agree to it AND THAT AGREEMENT IS REPORTED TO CONGRESS.

The requirement that the Mansfield Amendment waiver agreement with the foreign country must be communicated to Congress before it can be effective, could hinder the amendment's usefulness to the Coast Guard, however, unless a rapid and simple means to accomplish this requirement is found. We are often required to request the permission of a foreign government to allow us to take law enforcement action against a vessel of their registry. This is accomplished telephonically through the Department of State and the American Embassy, then followed up by message cable as time permits. To be effective, procedures to obtain a Mansfield waiver agreement must be done in a similar manner. The Coast Guard must have:

- an umbrella agreement with the foreign country, permitting case-by-case waivers of Mansfield, and that umbrella agreement is communicated to Congress (thereby eliminating case-by-case notifications); or

The State Department is investigating procedures for obtaining these Mansfield Amendment waivers.

Now I'd like to briefly review the Coast Guard's law enforcement mission and its outlook toward the future.

During the past several years, we have increased the number of cutter patrol days and aircraft operating hours devoted to drug interdiction, and we have increased 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.

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 41 new twin-jet Falcon medium range search aircraft have completed their second full year of operations, increasing our air reconnaissance capability considerably. The first of six AIREYE sensor systems for our Falcon aircraft is currently undergoing operational evaluation. The remaining five are expected to be operational in 1987. 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. The new, more capable HH-65 helicopters are being received to ultimately replace our fleet of HH-52 short range helicopters. These new ship-deployable helicopters will markedly improve our at-sea surveillance capabilities because of their higher speed and better navigation capability. Sixteen new patrol boats have been 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.

We have been looking at other tools. For example, we are deploying leased Sea Based Aerostats (SBA's). Each 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. Meant to be part of a coordinated operation, the surface target information it acquires is passed to a command and control cutter for evaluation and deployment of other assigned units, both surface and air.

The continuous large area radar coverage possible with such systems 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. Our initial aerostat experience has shown that cutters and aircraft can be 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 searches a relatively large area for prolonged periods of time. Operational 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 can be freed to perform target identification. As conceived, the 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. While the aerostat will not replace our cutters and aircraft, it does allow us to use them much more effectively.

Better intelligence remains 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 United States carrying contraband. During the past year improvements have been made in the collection, evaluation, and dissemination of intelligence. 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. Our new intelligence coordination center here in Washington, D.C. maintains a 24-hour all-source intelligence watch to exploit all intelligence systems available to the Coast Guard. It produces 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. 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.

Part of our improvements in the intelligence area have come about due to our active participation in NNBS, the Attorney General's Organized Crime Drug Enforcement Task Forces (OCDETFs) and other ongoing 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 a wide variety 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.

The operational efforts to stem the flow of drugs have become increasingly dependent on the coordination of all law enforcement agencies' interdiction and intelligence gathering activities.

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