

STATEMENT  
OF  
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CHIEF OF STAFF, U. S. COAST GUARD  
BEFORE THE  
HOUSE COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT OPERATIONS,  
SUBCOMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT INFORMATION,  
JUSTICE, AND AGRICULTURE

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Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee, I am RADM D.C. Thompson, Chief of Staff of the Coast Guard. It is a pleasure to appear before you today to provide an update on the Coast Guard's role in maritime drug law enforcement.

The Coast Guard's drug interdiction strategy has in past years been mainly directed toward intercepting motherships as they transit the major Caribbean passes or "choke points." This is complemented by cutter patrols elsewhere, as available, in areas such as the Bahamas, Eastern Passes of the Caribbean, and the Gulf, Atlantic and Pacific coastal areas. However, despite our stepped up efforts and increased vessel seizures, the amount of contraband seized under this operating scenario has remained fairly constant.

In the fall of 1984, a new strategy has been employed. It is markedly different and aggressive, seeking to disrupt drug traffic routes. It is forward-based, operating in the southern Caribbean just off the coast of suspected Colombian shipping areas instead of waiting along suspected trafficking routes for the smugglers to come to us. It involves a concentration of forces from many agencies and countries, both ashore and afloat, working with maximum coordination and differing from the usual independent operations of these forces. It relies on the tactics of surprise and deception rather than more predictable routines.

Adoption of this strategy was facilitated by a growing awareness among our allies in Central and South America of the mutual problems stemming from drug smuggling. Our allies realized that drug smuggling not only promotes criminal activity in the U.S., but it also threatens their own domestic security. Use of this strategy was also made possible by the increased ability to coordinate the efforts of U.S. law enforcement agencies and the armed forces under the aegis of the National Narcotics Border Interdiction System (NNBIS). The first operation to bring all of the factors in this strategy together was called Wagonwheel. It was mounted in November and December, 1984, on a national and international scale, as part of an even broader operation known as Hat Trick.

Hat Trick was followed by other operations, Blue Lightning and Thunderstorm, in 1985. These involved coordinated law enforcement efforts between the Government of the Bahamas and the U.S., and their 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 operations were so successful that members of the Royal Bahamian Defense Force have continued to ride Coast Guard cutters operating near Bahamian waters on a nearly continuous basis since these operations.

Operation Hat Trick II is a current operation very similar to Hat Trick I, but on a larger 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 domestic anti-drug programs with our operations.

The benefits of these operations are numerous. We feel that during these operations maritime smuggling from the participating major source or transshipment countries comes to a virtual standstill. The smugglers are forced to stockpile their crops or seek alternative, more costly methods of transport. The stockpiled contraband risks seizure by in-country forces. Additionally, the smugglers' normal activities are disrupted. The deterrence value of these operations is immeasurable. We feel the reduced seizures of 1985 are partially attributed to the deterrent effect of these numerous major operations.

During the past several years, we have increased the number of cutter patrol days and aircraft operating hours devoted to drug interdiction, as well as our ability to respond quickly to sightings and other intelligence. The lessons learned from the operations I just touched on, however, also show that coordination is the key to increased law enforcement productivity. The operational efforts to stem the overall flow of drugs have also become increasingly dependent on the coordination of all law enforcement agencies' interdiction and intelligence gathering activities. Part of our improvements 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. The Coast Guard remains committed to improving the coordination and cooperation among all involved parties ... the other drug enforcement agencies, the other armed forces and our Caribbean allies. We see it as essential to improving the productivity and effectiveness of our existing federal 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.