

Coast Guard, Partners Stop Multiple Smuggling Events off Puerto Rico

SAN JUAN, Puerto Rico – The Coast Guard interdicted a vessel Jan. 7 with 35 Dominican migrants and 4 kilograms of heroin approximately 34 miles west of Desecheo, Puerto Rico, the 7th Coast Guard District said in a release.

The crew of a Coast Guard Air Station Miami HC-144 Ocean Sentry, deployed to Air Station Borinquen, Puerto Rico, detected the vessel on the evening of Jan. 7. Watchstanders with Coast Guard Sector San Juan diverted the Cutter Heriberto Hernandez, which arrived on scene, embarked the 35 migrants and discovered a backpack with 4 kilograms of heroin floating near the vessel.

“While this interdiction is certainly a success of Coast Guard operational units through Operation Unified Resolve partnered with the Caribbean Border Interagency Group, it is also a symptom of a serious threat to our national security and maritime borders where narcotics smuggling is paired with illegal migrant ventures.” said Capt. Jason Ryan, chief of enforcement for the 7th Coast Guard District.

“Together with other DHS [Department of Homeland Security] components and local law enforcement partners, we will continue to diligently patrol throughout the Caribbean Basin and Florida Straits to stem the flow of maritime smuggling and criminal organizations that bring violence to our shores and fuel the growing epidemic of drug use and overdoses throughout our country.”

On Jan. 10, 27 of the migrants were repatriated to the Dominican Republic, while the remaining eight were transferred into the custody of the Department of Justice’s District of

Puerto Rico for further investigation and possible prosecution. One of the individual's is a suspected smuggler who is being investigated for participation in prior smuggling operations in which several migrants lost their lives.

In the past month, the Coast Guard and partners have made multiple interdictions in the Caribbean. Heriberto Hernandez is a 154-foot fast-response cutter homeported in San Juan.