Coast Guard, Caribbean Border Interagency Group Seize $30 Million in Cocaine off Puerto Rico

SAN JUAN, Puerto Rico – Coast Guard and Caribbean Border Interagency Group (CBIG) law enforcement authorities seized 2,324 pounds of cocaine, worth an estimated $30 million, following the interdiction of a go-fast vessel off Luquillo, Puerto Rico, Oct. 13 the 7th Coast Guard District said in an Oct. 16 release.

This interdiction is the result of ongoing multi-agency law enforcement efforts in support of Operation Caribbean Guard and the Caribbean Border Interagency Group.

“This successful interdiction is a testament to the crew’s vigilance, dedication to the mission, and quick action, and I couldn’t be prouder,” said Lt. Katherine Ustler, Coast Guard Cutter Donald Horsley commanding officer. “Their efforts, along with support from our partner agencies, directly prevented over a ton of cocaine from reaching the streets of Puerto Rico.”

While on a routine patrol of the area, the crew of the Donald Horsley detected a suspicious go-fast vessel at 1:16 a.m. Oct. 13 transiting without navigational lights and three people onboard, approximately nine nautical miles off the coast of Luquillo.

Coast Guard watchstanders in Sector San Juan alerted CBIG partner agencies of the developing situation, while the Donald Horsley remained in hot pursuit of the go-fast with the assistance of unit’s Over-the-Horizon IV cutter boat.

Upon detecting the Coast Guard's presence, the crew of the go-fast proceeded to attempt to flee the area at high speed with Donald Horsley's cutter boat remaining in hot pursuit. During the pursuit, the Donald Horsley crew observed the suspected smugglers jettison numerous bales of their cargo overboard. Shortly thereafter, the go-fast made landfall near La Pared Beach in Luquillo, where the smugglers fled the area and abandoned the go-fast with the remaining cargo onboard.

Following the pursuit, Donald Horsley combined efforts with responding U.S. Customs and Border Protection Caribbean Air and Marine Branch and Puerto Rico Police Joint Forces of Rapid Action marine units, as well as, Immigration and Customs Enforcement's (ICE) Homeland Security Investigations (HSI) land teams, which located and recovered 47 bales from the water and the abandoned go-fast. A Coast Guard MH-65 Dolphin helicopter and a Coast Guard Auxiliary fixed-wing aircraft also assisted in the search for the jettisoned cargo. The recovered cargo tested positive for cocaine.

The seized contraband is in the custody of ICE-HSI, which is leading the investigation into this case.

Operation Caribbean Guard is a Department of Homeland Security multi-agency law enforcement operation to support ongoing efforts in Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands executed under the San Juan Regional Coordinating Mechanism/CBIG.

CBIG unifies efforts between U.S. Customs and Border Protection, the U.S. Coast Guard, U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, the United States Attorney's Office for the District of Puerto Rico, and Puerto Rico Police Joint Forces of Rapid Action, in their common goal of securing the borders of Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands against illegal migrant and drug smuggling.

Donald Horsley is a 154-foot fast-response cutter homeported in San Juan, Puerto Rico.