Coast Guard, CBIG Interdict Go-Fast, Seize $30 Million in Cocaine

SAINT THOMAS, U.S. Virgin Islands – The crew of the Coast Guard Cutter Joseph Tezanos offloaded 2,606 pounds of cocaine and transferred custody of three suspected smugglers Dec. 14 to U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) special agents in St. Thomas U.S. Virgin Islands, the 7th Coast Guard District said in a release.

Coast Guard and Caribbean Border Interagency Group (CBIG) law enforcement authorities seized the $30 million cocaine shipment and apprehended the suspected smugglers following the interdiction of a go-fast vessel on the morning of Dec. 11 in international waters off Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands.

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

The suspected smugglers are facing likely federal prosecution by the U.S. Attorney's Office for the District of the U.S. Virgin Islands.

"This case was a team effort and perfect example of Caribbean Border Interagency Group partners working in coordination with Joint Interagency Task Force-East to protect the people of Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands," said Lt. Cmdr. Mario Gil, commanding officer of Joseph Tezanos. "This case involved a high-speed chase of over 10 hours in challenging weather conditions that was possible thanks to the tenacity and persistence of the Tezano's crew and of our partners, who are proud to have completed the mission and prevented a large

quantity of drugs from reaching the streets.”

While on a routine patrol, the crew of a HC-144 Ocean Sentry aircraft from Air Station Miami detected a suspicious go-fast vessel Dec. 10 transiting with three people onboard, approximately 65 nautical miles north of San Juan. Upon sunset, the go-fast continued to transit in the dark without the use of navigational lights.

Coast Guard watchstanders in Sector San Juan alerted CBIG partner agencies of the developing situation and diverted the Coast Guard Cutters Joseph Tezanos and Thetis to interdict the suspect vessel. The crews of two Customs and Border Protection Caribbean Air and Marine Branch maritime patrol aircrafts also responded and supported the interdiction by maintaining aerial surveillance of the go-fast.

Throughout the pursuit, the Coast Guard and CBP aircrews vectored-in Joseph Tezanos to the go-fast’s position. Once on scene, Tezanos remained in hot pursuit, as the crew launched the cutter’s Over-the-Horizon Boat IV that closed-in and interdicted the go-fast approximately 95 miles nautical miles northeast of St. Thomas.

The three suspects onboard the go-fast claimed to be Dominican Republic nationals. The Tezanos boat crew located 52 bales of suspected contraband aboard the go-fast that a field test yielded positive results for cocaine. The Tezanos crew apprehended and embarked the suspected smugglers along with the seized contraband.

The go-fast was later destroyed as a hazard to navigation.

The suspected smugglers and seized contraband where transported to Saint Thomas, U.S. Virgin Islands, where they were transferred to the custody of DEA special agents, who are leading the investigation into this case.