Coast Guard, Columbian Navy Interdict Suspected Drugs



A Coast Guard Cutter Vigilant over-the-horizon boat crew approaches a 72-foot vessel about 46 miles northeast of Panama on June 8. The Coast Guard and partner agencies interdicted about 1,500 packages testing positive for cocaine. U.S. Coast Guard

MIAMI – The U.S. Coast Guard and partner agencies interdicted about 1,500 packages testing positive for cocaine on a 72-foot motor vessel approximately 46 miles northeast of Panama on June 8, the Coast Guard 7th District said.

While on routine patrol, a Coast Guard HC-130 maritime patrol aircraft crew detected a suspect motor vessel traveling northeast of Panama. The Coast Guard Cutter Vigilant crew launched an over-the-horizon small boat with an embarked law enforcement team, who proceeded to board the vessel and discovered that it was taking on water.

The Vigilant sent a rescue and assistance team aboard, who were able to contain the source of flooding at the request of the motor vessel crew. The Vigilant's law enforcement team continued the boarding and discovered general cargo that was suspected of containing contraband. After completing the initial boarding, the crew recommended a further inspection be completed in port due to sea-state and safety concerns and to more fully access the cargo and cargo holds.

Coordinating with Colombian authorities, the Vigilant crew placed the motor vessel, which had experienced a mechanical problem, in tow and transferred it to the Colombian coast guard and navy.

The Colombian navy continued the boarding pier side and discovered over 16,700 pounds of suspected contraband. Lab

test reports yielded positive hits for cocaine, which validated both the efforts of the Vigilant crew and the Colombian partners. As final lab testing continues, this drug seizure is predicted to be worth up to $286 million.

“Despite the various challenges our crew faced during this multi-day boarding, they demonstrated the utmost professionalism and resiliency, identifying numerous indicators of contraband in arduous conditions while preserving the seaworthiness of the vessel,” said Cmdr. Fred Bertsch, commanding officer of the Vigilant.

“We are extremely appreciative of the coordination and substantial efforts undertaken by our Colombian partners to continue the law enforcement efforts where we left off. As transnational criminal organizations continue to adapt their techniques and procedures, we will continue to work with our partner nations to thwart their illicit activities is the region.”

“As we address the persistent threats our nation faces across our maritime approaches, the success of this highly collaborative operation speaks to the value of our relationship with our valued international partner, Colombia, and of the mutual successes we achieve when we coordinate our efforts,” said Rear Adm. Eric C. Jones, commanding officer of the Coast Guard’s 7th District.