

Coast Guard Offloads More Than \$24 Million in Illegal Narcotics Interdicted in Eastern Caribbean



Crew members from USCGC Margaret Norvell (WPC 1105) board a drug smuggling vessel carrying 30 bales of illegal narcotics approximately 190 miles south of Puerto Rico March 24, 2024. The bales weighed more than 1,850 pounds and have an estimated street value of approximately \$24.3 million. (U.S. Coast Guard photo courtesy of the USCGC Margaret Norvell crew)

U.S. Coast Guard 7th District, April 5, 2024

MIAMI – The crew of Coast Guard Cutter Margaret Norvell offloaded more than 1,850 pounds of cocaine with an assessed street value of approximately \$24.3 million in Miami, Friday.

The crew interdicted a low-profile go-fast vessel carrying 30 bales of the illicit narcotics and detained five suspected smugglers approximately 190 miles south of Puerto Rico.

The suspected smugglers will face prosecution in federal courts by the Department of Justice.

"I am incredibly proud of our crew," said Lt. Cmdr. Colin Weaver, Commanding Officer of cutter Margaret Norvell. "I am also grateful for the exceptional coordination and teamwork extending beyond our unit that contributed to this interdiction. Countering drug trafficking organizations that operate throughout the Caribbean depends upon the international and interagency partnerships that JIATF-S and Joint Task Force-East bring to the fight."

The Margaret Norvell crew deployed with two boarding officers from Coast Guard Tactical Law Enforcement Team-South (TACLET-S) based in Opa Locka, Florida. TACLET-S is part of the Coast Guard's deployable specialized forces program, with advanced training in high-risk interdiction operations in the maritime environment, including non-compliant vessel pursuit missions. Law enforcement detachments from TACLET-S deploy aboard Coast Guard, U.S. Navy and foreign allied ships to augment their capabilities and authorities to perform counter drug missions under U.S. law.

"Drug busts like this one by Margaret Norvell's crew save lives by reducing the flow of harmful narcotics to the United States and disrupting the illicit maritime activity of transnational criminal organizations," said Capt. John B. McWhite, chief of enforcement for Coast Guard District Seven. "The efforts to counter illicit smuggling in the Caribbean are truly a collaboration between the Coast Guard and our federal partners and regional allies. The Coast Guard will continue to do our part to deny drug trafficking networks access to maritime smuggling routes in support of the National Drug Control Strategy."

Detecting and interdicting illegal drug traffickers on the high seas involves significant interagency and international coordination. The Joint Interagency Task Force South in Key West, Florida conducts the detection and monitoring of aerial and maritime transit of illegal drugs. Once interdiction becomes imminent, the law enforcement phase of the operation begins, and control of the operation shifts to the U.S. Coast Guard throughout the interdiction and apprehension. Interdictions in the Caribbean Sea are performed by members of the U.S. Coast Guard under the authority and control of the Coast Guard's Seventh District, headquartered in Miami.

The cutter Margaret Norvell is one of 20 Sentinel-class fast response cutters homeported in the Seventh District. The FRCs are multi-mission patrol boats tasked with vital homeland security missions including drug and migrant interdiction; ports, waterways and coastal security; fisheries enforcement; search and rescue; and national defense. FRCs are named after Coast Guard enlisted heroes in service history, and the cutter's namesake, Margaret Norvell, served for 41 years with the U.S. Lighthouse Service in Louisiana from 1891 to 1932.

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