Coast Guard, Panamanian Authorities Stop Drug-Smuggling Operation Near Panama



A Coast Guard Cutter Escanaba small boat crew recovered 40 bales of cocaine April 13, 2020. U.S. COAST GUARD / Coast Guard Cutter Escanaba

MIAMI – The Coast Guard stopped a drug smuggling operation April 13 in international waters northeast of Panama, the Coast Guard 7th District said in an April 23 release.

A Coast Guard Helicopter Interdiction Tactical Squadron MH-65 Dolphin helicopter crew, forward deployed with the Coast Guard Cutter Escanaba (WMEC-907), spotted a suspect fishing vessel with five people aboard. The cutter Escanaba crew sent a small boat crew to the scene.

The cutter Escanaba small boat crew recovered 40 bales of cocaine, and a nearby Panamanian law enforcement boat crew recovered 43 bales, taking a total approximately $60 million wholesale that would have otherwise funded transnational criminal organizations. The 40 bales recovered by the Escanaba crew were transferred to the Coast Guard Cutter Raymond Evans (WPC-1110) crew.

“During this uncertain time, our U.S. military forces continue to aggressively interdict narcotics being smuggled in our hemisphere,” said Vice Adm. Scott Buschman, Coast Guard Atlantic Area commander. “Like the crew of the Escanaba, we will continue to protect our nation’s maritime borders, ensure our security and carry out all Coast Guard’s missions.”

On April 1, U.S. Southern Command began enhanced counternarcotics operations in the Western Hemisphere to disrupt the flow of drugs in support of presidential national security objectives. The interdictions, including the actual boardings, are led and conducted by the members of the U.S. Coast Guard.