

Coast Guard, U.K. Royal Navy Ships Seize \$46.2 Million in Cocaine in the Caribbean



Crew members of the Coast Guard Cutter Bear offload 3,086 pounds of cocaine on Feb. 4 in San Juan, Puerto Rico. The drugs were seized following two separate interdictions in the Caribbean by the Coast Guard and the U.K. Royal Navy on Jan. 24 and Jan. 30, which resulted in the detention of nine smugglers.

SAN JUAN, Puerto Rico – The U.S. Coast Guard, U.K. Royal Navy and U.S. law enforcement partners seized 3,086 pounds of cocaine and detained nine suspected drug smugglers following two separate interdictions in the Caribbean on Jan. 24 and Jan. 30, according to the Coast Guard 7th District.

The seized drug shipments are estimated to have a wholesale value of more than \$46.2 million.

The interdiction was a result of an international, multiagency law-enforcement effort in support of Operation Unified Resolve, Operation Caribbean Guard, Campaign Martillo (a joint, interagency, 20-nation collaborative counter narcotic effort) and the Caribbean Corridor Strike Force (CCSF) and will be prosecuted by the U.S. Federal District Court for the District of Puerto Rico.

“These efforts, underpinned by our unwavering resolve to stop drug smuggling vessels at sea, greatly contribute to safeguarding our citizens in Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands and protecting our shared interests of a safer and more secure Caribbean,” said Rear Adm. Eric C. Jones, commander of the 7th District.

“These interdictions highlight the importance of working with

our international partners as we combat drug trafficking,” said W. Stephen Muldrow, U.S. attorney for the District of Puerto Rico. “These large drug seizures make our community safer by keeping the narcotics out of our neighborhoods. We commend all of our partner agencies for their steadfast efforts.”

“These operations reiterate the significance of intelligence and resource sharing among agencies,” said A.J. Collazo, the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration Caribbean Division special agent in charge. “We will continue to aggressively target and disrupt drug-trafficking organizations operating in the Caribbean.”

In the first interdiction, the Royal Navy’s RFA Mounts Bay, while on patrol with a U.S. Coast Guard law enforcement detachment (LEDET) and a Coast Guard helicopter interdiction tactical squadron (HITRON) armed helicopter onboard, detected two suspicious go-fast vessels, about 74 nautical miles south of St. Croix, U.S. Virgin Islands.

The RFA Mounts Bay launched the Coast Guard MH-65 helicopter and the ship’s pursuit vessel with the Coast Guard LEDET to interdict both suspect vessels.

The Coast Guard LEDET boarding team, with the assistance of RFA Mounts Bay crew members, boarded both suspect vessels, apprehending the seven men and seizing 42 bales of suspected contraband.

In the second interdiction, a maritime patrol aircraft detected a northbound target of interest, southeast of Isla Beata, Dominican Republic. The Coast Guard Cutter Bear along with a helicopter responded to interdict the go-fast vessel. The Bear’s over-the-horizon cutter boat and embarked helicopter arrived on scene and stopped the go-fast. The Bear’s boarding team detained the two men aboard the

go-fast after discovering 13 bales of suspected contraband.

The Bear delivered the seized contraband and detainees from both cases to U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) officers, Immigrations and Customs Enforcement (ICE)-HSI, and DEA special agents in San Juan, Puerto Rico, on Feb. 4.

Between October 2019 and December 2019, the Coast Guard and Caribbean Border Interagency Group authorities have seized 12,060 kilograms of cocaine and 407 pounds of marijuana during law-enforcement operations surrounding Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands. The wholesale value for these seizures is more than \$314 million.

Cutter Bear is a 270-foot medium-endurance cutter homeported in Portsmouth, Virginia. The RFA Mounts Bay is a Bay-class auxiliary landing ship dock belonging to the Royal Fleet Auxiliary, which provides logistical support to the Royal Navy.