

Coast Guard Crew Offloads 26,000+ Pounds of Cocaine, Marijuana Worth \$390 Million



Coast Guard Cutter Bertholf (WMSL-750) crewmembers inspect a low-profile semi-submersible in international waters of the Eastern Pacific Ocean Aug. 14, 2020. Coast Guard crews seized more than 26,000 pounds of cocaine worth an estimated \$390 million, through thirteen separate suspected drug smuggling interdictions and disruptions off the coasts of Mexico, Central and South America between late May and late August. U.S. Coast Guard

SAN DIEGO – The crew of the Coast Guard Cutter Bertholf (WMSL-750) offloaded more than 26,000 pounds of seized cocaine and marijuana in San Diego, Sept. 10, the Coast Guard 11th District said in a release.

The drugs, worth an estimated \$390 million, were seized in international waters of the Eastern Pacific Ocean. They represent 13 suspected drug smuggling vessel interdictions off the coasts of Mexico, Central and South America between late May and late August by the following Coast Guard and Navy ships:

- The Coast Guard Cutter Bertholf (WMSL-750) crew was responsible for two interdictions seizing approximately 6,700 pounds of cocaine.
- The Coast Guard Cutter Stratton (WMSL-752) crew was responsible for three interdictions seizing approximately 6,000 pounds of cocaine.
- The Coast Guard Cutter Confidence (WMEC-619) crew was responsible for two interdictions seizing approximately 50 pounds of cocaine.
- The Coast Guard Cutter Decisive (WMEC-629) crew was responsible for one interdiction seizing approximately

- 1,900 pounds of cocaine.
- The Coast Guard Cutter Venturous (WMEC-625) crew was responsible for one interdiction seizing approximately 1,100 pounds of cocaine.
 - The Coast Guard Cutter Tampa (WMEC-902) crew was responsible for two interdictions seizing approximately 1,600 pounds of cocaine and 3,650 pounds of marijuana.
 - The USS Kidd (DDG-100) with embarked Coast Guard Law Enforcement Detachment (LEDET) was responsible for one interdiction seizing approximately 500 pounds of cocaine.
 - The USS Preble (DDG-88) with embarked Coast Guard Law Enforcement Detachment (LEDET) was responsible for one interdiction seizing approximately 4,400 pounds of cocaine.

Speakers at the Bertholf drug-offloading event included Director Jim Carroll, Office of National Drug Control Policy, Mr. Robert Brewer, U.S. Attorney for the Southern District of California, Adm. Karl Schultz, commandant of the United States Coast Guard, and Capt. Brian Anderson, Coast Guard Cutter Bertholf commanding officer.

The offload from the Bertholf follows the August 27, 2020, offload of more than 11,500 pounds of seized suspected cocaine and 17,000 pounds of marijuana from the Coast Guard Cutter Hamilton (WMSL-753) in Port Everglades representing 10 interdictions in the same region. So far in fiscal year 2020, the Coast Guard has made more than 171 interdictions, seized more than 282,000 pounds of cocaine, 57,000 pounds of marijuana, and detained more than 391 suspected smugglers in drug transit zones of the Eastern Pacific Ocean and the Caribbean Sea.

“I’m extremely proud of the hard work and dedication displayed by the men and women of the Coast Guard Cutter Bertholf, especially in this current environment,” said Anderson. “The crew adapted and implemented new protocols in response to the

added risk of COVID-19 exposure in the course of operations. They remained focused on what they needed to do to keep each other safe and effectively accomplish the mission of keeping these drugs off our streets, which will save countless lives.”

On April 1, U.S. Southern Command began enhanced counter-narcotics operations in the Western Hemisphere to disrupt the flow of drugs in support of Presidential National Security Objectives. Numerous U.S. agencies from the Departments of Defense, Justice, and Homeland Security cooperated in the effort to combat transnational organized crime. The Coast Guard, Navy, Customs and Border Protection, FBI, Drug Enforcement Administration, and Immigration and Customs Enforcement, along with allied and international partner agencies, play a role in counter-drug operations.

“The routine during this patrol was different than most, but the U.S. Coast Guard rose to the challenge, as they always do,” said Carroll. “These efforts by our U.S. Coast Guard and United States Navy are critical to reducing the availability of illicit drugs in our country. They are absolutely committed to saving lives, and their work that you see here today will result in lives being saved across the United States.”

The fight against drug cartels in the Eastern Pacific Ocean requires unity of effort in all phases from detection, monitoring and interdictions, to criminal prosecutions by international partners and U.S. Attorneys’ Offices in districts across the nation. The law enforcement phase of counter-smuggling operations in the Eastern Pacific Ocean is conducted under the authority of the 11th Coast Guard District, headquartered in Alameda. The interdictions, including the actual boardings, are led and conducted by members of the U.S. Coast Guard.

“These results are unity of effort in action,” said Shultz. “Whole of Government, whole of partnerships, this is what it

takes to keep illicit drugs off American streets. We take these drugs down at sea, where they're most vulnerable, where they're most susceptible to intercept. In doing that, we break the cycle of those drugs landing in Costa Rica, Panama and Mexico and triggering violence and corruption. That's why this matters."

The Bertholf is a 418-foot national security cutter, commissioned in 2008 and homeported in Alameda.