

Coast Guard Intercepts Semi-Submersible, Seizes 5,000 Pounds of Cocaine

PORTSMOUTH, Va. – The crew of the U.S. Coast Guard Cutter Harriet Lane intercepted a suspected semi-submersible smuggling vessel in the eastern Pacific Ocean on Oct. 23 and seized about 5,000 pounds of cocaine, the Coast Guard Atlantic Area said in a release.

The crew was alerted to the presence of the vessel by the crew of a maritime patrol aircraft on patrol in the region. Boarding teams from the cutter deployed in interceptor boats and stopped the vessel just before midnight.

The boarding teams took control of the vessel before the four suspected smugglers aboard could sink the craft using installed scuttling valves. Cocaine valued at about \$69 million was later removed from the semi-submersible.

“I am really proud of our crew and the precision and professionalism with which they conducted this interdiction,” said Cmdr. Dorothy Hernaez, commanding officer of the Harriet Lane. “It was an all-hands-on-deck effort to properly position the cutter and to safely make the seizure. This interdiction was made possible by great teamwork, including excellent air support provided by Joint Interagency Task Force South and assistance from Coast Guard Cutter Bertholf’s crew in off-loading the bulk contraband from the vessel.”

Coast Guard assets deployed in the eastern Pacific and Caribbean increase the U.S. and allied presence in these known drug transit zones off the coasts of Central and South America, in support of the Coast Guard’s Western Hemisphere Strategy. Interdictions are in support of Campaign Martillo, a regional initiative targeting illicit trafficking that

threatens security and prosperity at the national, regional and international levels.

The interdictions are facilitated by detection and monitoring information from Joint Interagency Task Force (JIATF) South, located in Key West, Florida. The law enforcement phase of counter-smuggling operations in the eastern Pacific is conducted under the authority of the Coast Guard 11th District headquartered in Alameda. Interdictions, including the actual boarding, are led and conducted by Coast Guard law enforcement personnel.