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REPORT BY THE

Comptroller General

OF THE UNITED STATES

SPR

The Coast Guard's Role In Drug Interception--How Much Is Enough?

RELEASED

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Accounting of Drug Interception by the Coast Guard

The Coast Guard has had some success in detecting and capturing drug smugglers on the high seas. For the most part, this is attributed to its cutters, aircraft, and electronics gear being superior to the equipment used by smugglers and its strategy of concentrating surveillance on areas through which smugglers must pass.

The Coast Guard needs to establish a drug enforcement goal to use in measuring its effectiveness and in determining its resource needs. It also should improve its training of personnel and communication with other law enforcement agencies.



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Report

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COMPTROLLER GENERAL OF THE UNITED STATES

WASHINGTON, D.C. 20548

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To the Chairman and Ranking Minority Member
Subcommittee on Coast Guard and Navigation
Committee on Merchant Marine and Fisheries
House of Representatives

As requested in your letter of June 30, 1978, we have evaluated the Coast Guard's operational capability in the conduct of its drug enforcement mission.

We discussed the information in this report with agency officials.

As arranged with your offices, unless you publicly announce its contents earlier, we plan no further distribution of this report until 30 days from the date of the report. At that time we will send copies to interested parties and make copies available to others upon request.

James B. Atch

Comptroller General
of the United States



COMPTROLLER GENERAL'S REPORT
TO THE CHAIRMAN AND RANKING
MINORITY MEMBER, SUBCOMMITTEE
ON COAST GUARD AND NAVIGATION,
HOUSE COMMITTEE ON MERCHANT
MARINE AND FISHERIES

THE COAST GUARD'S
ROLE IN DRUG
INTERCEPTION--HOW MUCH
IS ENOUGH?

D I G E S T

The Coast Guard has had some success as a maritime drug enforcement agency--in 1978 it seized 140 vessels and 3.2 million pounds of marijuana, which is for the most part attributable to its

--cutters, aircraft, and electronics gear being superior to the equipment used by smugglers; and

--strategy of concentrating surveillance on certain routes ("choke points") through which smugglers must travel.

The major source for marijuana is Colombia, South America. Most drug smugglers approach the U.S. coastline from Colombia in "mother ships" which are met by smaller "contact" boats. Contraband is offloaded to these smaller boats which then proceed to shore. Seizure of a mother ship generally results in the capture of large quantities of marijuana. Relatively small quantities are seized from contact boats. The Coast Guard's strategy emphasizes the seizure of mother ships by patrolling the choke points between Colombia and the United States. But it is estimated that cutters are at these points only 35 percent of the time because not enough are available. (See p. 8.)

While the Coast Guard has established a general goal for its law enforcement mission, it does not have a specific drug enforcement goal. GAO believes that the Coast Guard should establish long-range goals as to the amount of drugs it would like to intercept and identify alternative approaches, acceptable time frames, and

various levels of resources necessary to achieve those goals. (See p. 14.)

The Coast Guard contracted for studies to (1) determine the nature and magnitude of Coast Guard operational law enforcement requirements and (2) provide the Coast Guard with a drug enforcement planning model for determining the types and quantities of resources needed. (See p. 13.)

Coast Guard cutters, aircraft, and electronics serve to detect and seize smuggler vessels. The Coast Guard is upgrading its existing equipment with improved radar and more accurate navigation gear and purchasing new cutters, helicopters, and fixed wing aircraft, which should strengthen Coast Guard drug interception capabilities.

Adequate law enforcement training has been lacking for Coast Guard personnel. As drug trafficking increases, more boardings, searches, arrests, and seizures of vessels will occur with increased risks of injury or death. In spite of these risks and the job knowledge required, the Coast Guard has neither established a job classification for law enforcement nor adopted minimum qualifications for boarding party crew members. (See p. 17.)

Accordingly, the Coast Guard should improve its training, consider establishing a law enforcement rating, and establish qualification standards for boarding parties. (See p. 22.)

The Customs Service, the Drug Enforcement Administration, and the Coast Guard do not have a common radio frequency for use in communicating directly with one another during their drug operations. Therefore, the three agencies adopted several methods that provide them with a communication link, such as

- sharing assigned frequencies,
- relaying messages from units by radio,
- sharing radios and personnel, and
- relaying radio messages to units by telephone. (See p. 15.)

While the above methods provide the agencies with a means to communicate with each other, a need for a common frequency exists to

- promote an increase in jointly planned and coordinated efforts and
- increase the effectiveness of unplanned and unexpected drug operations. (See p. 14.)

GAO believes that the Coast Guard should explore the desirability of acquiring a common law enforcement frequency with the other agencies. (See p. 16.)

AGENCY COMMENTS

The Coast Guard concurred with the facts stated in this report but did not take a position on GAO's conclusions and recommendations.



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ABBREVIATIONS

DEA	Drug Enforcement Administration
GAO	General Accounting Office
HF	high frequency
LORAN	long-range aid to navigation
UHF	ultra high frequency
VHF	very high frequency
WHEC	high-endurance cutter
WMEC	medium-endurance cutter
WPB	patrol boat

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

By letter dated June 30, 1978, the Chairman and Ranking Minority Member of the Subcommittee on Coast Guard and Navigation, House Committee on Merchant Marine and Fisheries, requested that we evaluate the Coast Guard's operational capability in conducting its maritime law enforcement mission. Our evaluation included

- an analysis of the performance characteristics of Coast Guard cutters and aircraft and the Coast Guard's ability to detect and capture smugglers of illicit drugs and
- an appraisal of current Coast Guard law enforcement training.

BACKGROUND ON THE MARITIME LAW ENFORCEMENT MISSION

The Coast Guard is the Nation's primary maritime law enforcement agency. It has jurisdiction over all violations of Federal laws on the high seas and waters over which the United States has jurisdiction.

The basic statutory authority for Coast Guard law enforcement stems from:

--14 U.S.C. 2:

"The Coast Guard shall enforce or assist in the enforcement of all applicable Federal laws on and under the high seas and waters subject to the jurisdiction of the United States;* * *"
and

--14 U.S.C. 89(a) which states in part:

"The Coast Guard may make inquiries, examinations, inspections, searches, seizures, and arrests upon the high seas and waters over which the United States has jurisdiction, for the prevention, detection, and suppression of violations of laws of the United States* * *."

On the basis of this authority, Coast Guard commissioned, warrant, and petty officers may board any vessel

subject to the jurisdiction or operation of any law of the United States to (1) address inquiries to those on board, (2) examine the ship's documents and papers, and (3) examine, inspect, and search the vessel for drugs and use force if necessary to compel compliance.

Narcotics control is an area of law enforcement having high Presidential priority. For example, as drug abuse became rampant in the 1950s and 1960s, President Johnson signed into law Drug Abuse Control Amendments of 1965 (Public Law 89-74, 79 Stat. 226) which substantially increased Federal efforts in drug law enforcement. In the early 1970s, the Nixon administration continued the emphasis on drug control efforts, initiating several actions and declaring a "war on drugs." Also, President Carter considers national control of drug abuse an urgent matter for his administration. Principal Federal strategies to reduce drug abuse in this country include making drugs (1) difficult to obtain, (2) expensive to buy, and (3) risky to possess, sell, or consume.

The Coast Guard believes various illicit drugs have been smuggled into the United States by sea. However, marijuana, cocaine, and hashish are the primary illicit substances moved in this manner. To enforce its responsibility for the interdiction of such drugs, the Coast Guard uses cutters, boats, and aircraft to patrol the Nation's shores. The current inventory of principal resources the Coast Guard uses in carrying out its drug interdiction mission, as well as other duties, includes

- 18 high-endurance cutters (WHEC), 1/
- 23 medium-endurance cutters (WMEC),
- 75 patrol boats (WPB),
- 25 long-range search aircraft,
- 31 medium-range search aircraft,
- 38 medium-range recovery aircraft, and
- 81 short-range recovery aircraft.

1/ "W" is the classification for the Coast Guard.

General characteristics of the above vessels and aircraft are described in appendix I. 1/

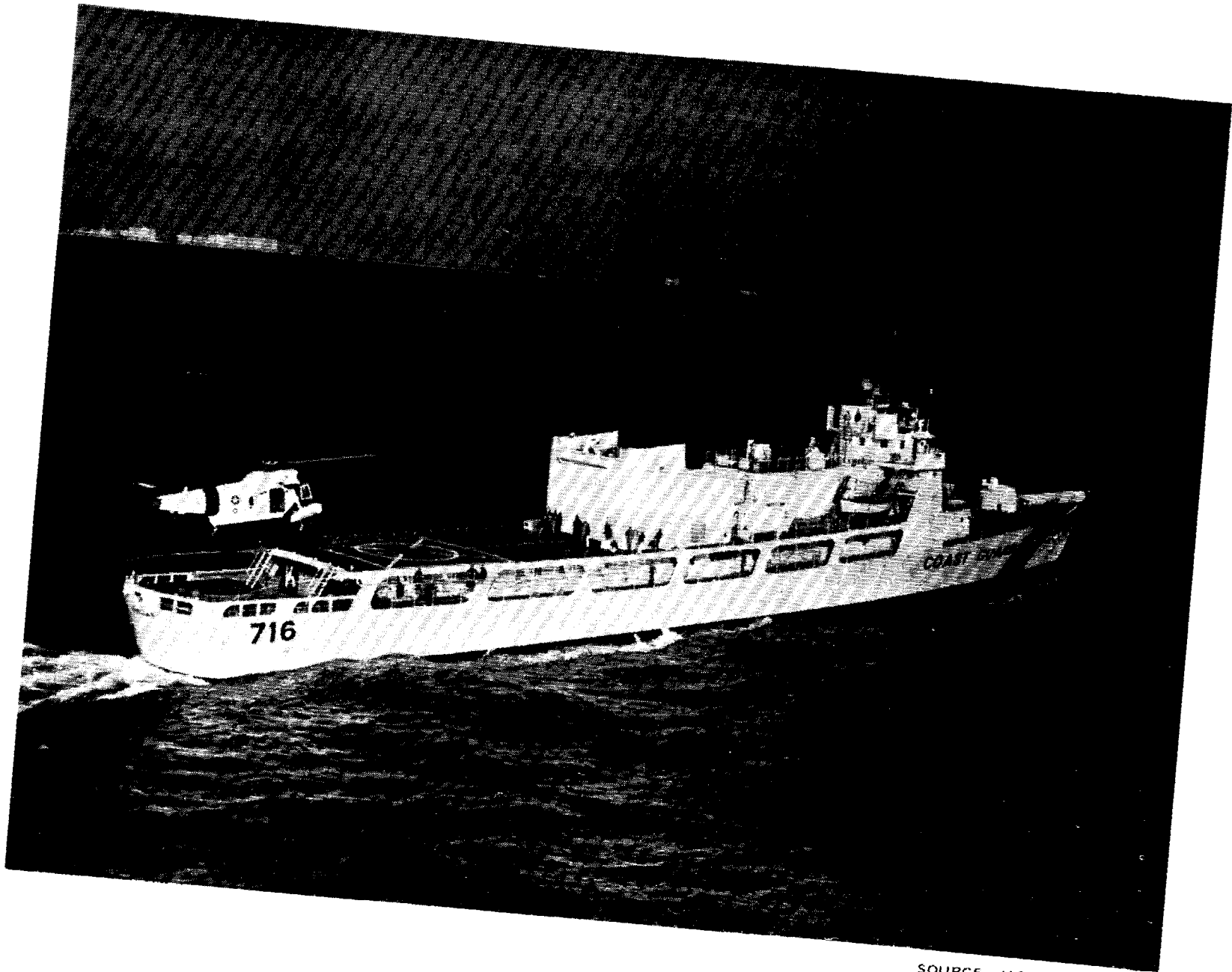
The above resources are utilized for the interdiction of drugs in various ways, such as

- single vessel patrols, usually a medium-endurance cutter or patrol boat;
- multiunit patrols, usually involving an endurance cutter with helicopter (see the following picture) and one or more patrol boats supported by land-based aircraft; and
- airborne surveillance flights to detect drug caches and report on suspect vessel activity.

On patrol, the Coast Guard is likely to stop and board smuggling vessels ranging in size from 300-foot freighters to relatively small (e.g., 17-foot) vessels, such as fishing and pleasure craft.

Since 1973, Coast Guard drug interdictions have increased rapidly. Although various illicit drugs are smuggled into the United States by vessel, the Coast Guard seized more marijuana than any other drug. Because of its physical characteristics (it is usually transported in compact, pressed bales), it is conspicuous and difficult to conceal or dispose of. Other drugs, such as cocaine and heroin, are usually smuggled in small quantities because of their high value and seldom will be detected during a routine Coast Guard boarding. Also, these drugs usually are jettisoned before the vessel is boarded. Results of the Coast Guard interdiction efforts since 1973 are shown on the following schedule.

1/ The Coast Guard also uses small patrol boats (30 to 44 feet) in its drug interdiction mission.



SOURCE: U.S. COAST GUARD

General Law Enforcement Interdiction Results
By Calendar Year

	<u>1973</u>	<u>1974</u>	<u>1975</u>	<u>1976</u>	<u>1977</u>	<u>1978(note a)</u>	<u>Total</u>
Vessels seized by Coast Guard	6	11	5	18	35	140	215
Vessels seized by other agencies with Coast Guard participation	1	3	2	10	22	25	63
Marijuana seized by Coast Guard (lbs.) (note b)	15,700	38,500	94,025	200,568	1,022,799	3,230,359	4,601,951
Marijuana seized by other agencies with Coast Guard participation (lbs.)	4,600	4,975	653	145,003	200,315	272,828	628,374
Cocaine seized by Coast Guard (kg.)	1	0	0	20	0	0	21
Cocaine seized by other agencies with Coast Guard participation (kg.)	0	0	0	10.1	0	.03	10.13
Hashish seized by Coast Guard (lbs.)	0	6,139	0	0	0	0	6,139
Hashish seized by other agencies with Coast Guard participation (lbs.)	0	0	2,000	0	1,700	1,100	4,800
Thai sticks seized by Coast Guard (lbs.) (note c)	0	0	0	10,185	17,130	4,500	31,815

a/The Coast Guard seized 500,000 quaalude (a depressant) tablets in 1978.

b/According to a Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) report, the "street" value of marijuana is \$363 a pound.

c/A very potent form of marijuana.

Approximately 85 to 90 percent of drug interdictions were made at the Coast Guard's 7th and 8th districts, headquartered in Miami, Florida, and New Orleans, Louisiana, respectively.

SCOPE

We evaluated the Coast Guard's capability to detect and capture smugglers, and the smugglers' capability to elude such capture. We also inquired into the Coast Guard's procedures for communicating by radio or other means with other Federal law enforcement agencies engaged in the interdiction of illicit drugs. We evaluated the drug enforcement training program.

Our review was performed principally at the Coast Guard headquarters in Washington, D.C., and the Coast Guard's 7th and 8th districts. We also contacted the Treasury Department's Customs Service and DEA.

CHAPTER 2

ASSESSMENT OF THE COAST GUARD'S

CAPABILITY TO REDUCE DRUG SMUGGLING

The Coast Guard has had some success in the drug interdiction program, which is attributable, for the most part, to two basic factors. First, the performance characteristics of the Coast Guard's cutters, aircraft, and electronics gear is superior to the equipment used by smugglers. Second, the Coast Guard's strategy of concentrating surveillance on certain routes ("choke points") through which smugglers must travel has permitted effective utilization of existing resources. However, the Coast Guard lacks sufficient equipment to provide continuous coverage, and it is estimated that cutters are present at the choke points only about 35 percent of the time. It is reasonable to assume that with increased coverage, the Coast Guard would improve its current estimated 8- to 10-percent interception rate. Additional coverage would, of course, require additional investment. A necessary first step in assessing the need for additional resources is to establish an interception goal. This has not been done. This goal should be based on and support the overall Federal strategy for controlling drugs.

The Coast Guard has the opportunity to be more effective by improving its radio communication with other Federal agencies engaged in drug smuggling prevention.

COMPARISON OF COAST GUARD AND SMUGGLER RESOURCES

In the 7th and 8th districts the Coast Guard uses the following principal resources in its drug interdiction program:

	<u>Number of units</u>	
	<u>7th district</u>	<u>8th district</u>
82-ft. WPB	7	8
95-ft. WPB	6	none
210-ft. WMEC	4	<u>a/4</u>
helicopter HH-52A	8	6

a/One WMEC is 213 ft.

The general characteristics of the above are included in appendix I.

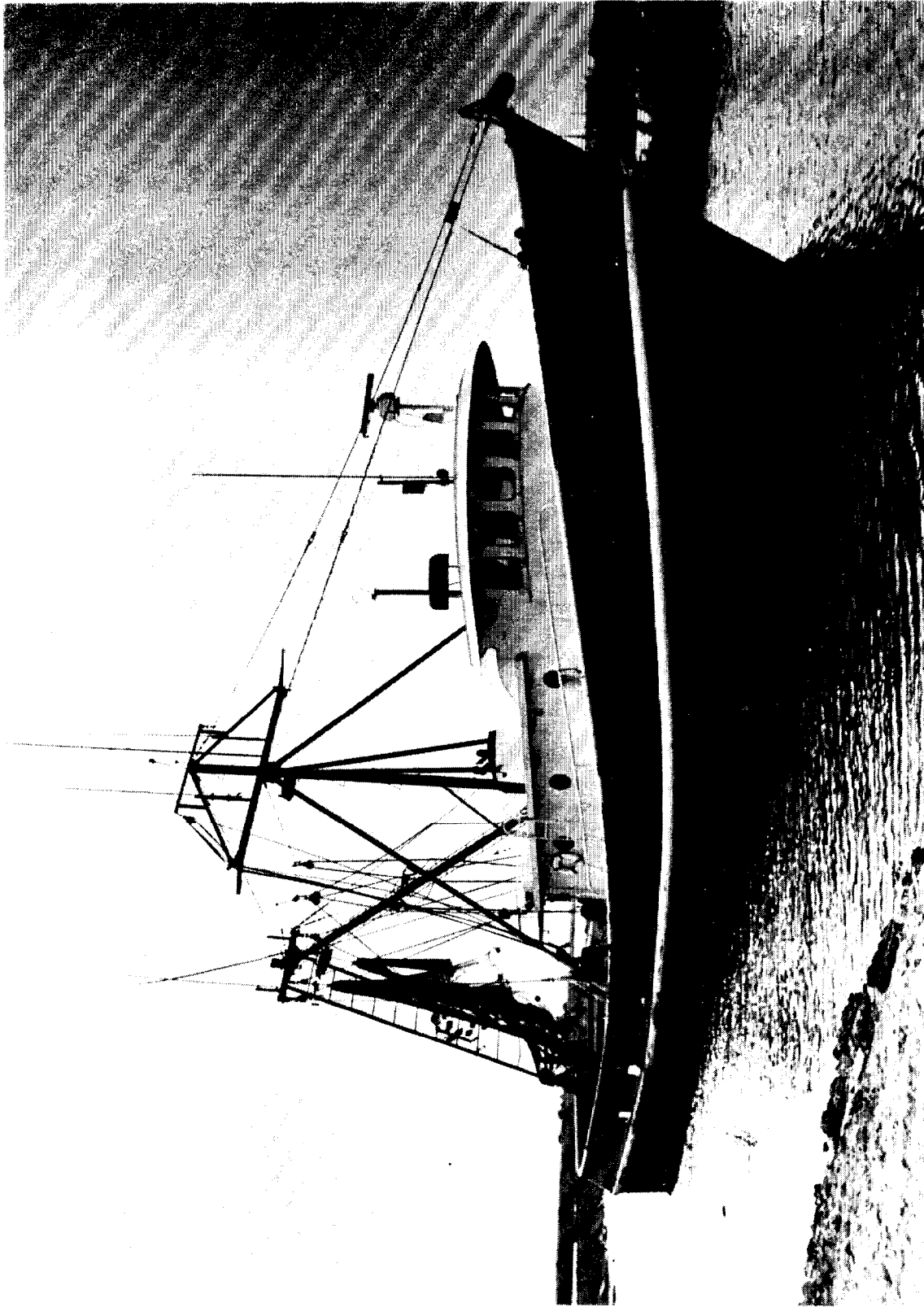
The smugglers use a variety of vessels, ranging from small pleasure craft to oceangoing freighters. Smugglers' methods of operations account for the wide variety of vessels seized. Principal among these is the mother ship (see the following picture of a seized mother ship) and contact boat strategy by which the larger vessels approach the U.S. coastline and are met by smaller load boats. Contraband is off-loaded to these smaller boats, most of which are capable of speeds faster than Coast Guard cutters. However, the larger mother ships (generally 60 to 300 feet in size) are slower than Coast Guard cutters and their seizure generally results in the interdiction of large quantities of contraband, principally marijuana. On the other hand, the seizure of a load boat results in the interdiction of relatively small quantities of contraband. Accordingly, the Coast Guard's interdiction efforts are directed principally at the mother ship. Obviously, the seizure of the mother ship results in the interdiction of larger quantities of illicit drugs--as contrasted with the seizure of a contact boat--which denies the smuggler the opportunity to disperse the cargo to contact boats. Once dispersed the chances of seizing major quantities of drugs are significantly reduced.

Colombia, South America, is presently the source of most of the contraband seized in the 7th and 8th districts. Appendix II shows the major drug routes used by smugglers from Colombia, in the vicinity of the Guajira peninsula. These routes traverse three principal channels--the Yucatan Channel and the Windward and Mona Passages--and the Coast Guard's strategy is to patrol these choke points to detect and seize smugglers. These choke points are patrolled by WMECs with assistance by HH-52A helicopters. However, we found that choke points are not patrolled continuously because not enough cutters and aircraft are available. Coast Guard officials in the 7th and 8th districts estimated that cutters are present at the choke points only about 35 percent of the time.

During calendar year 1978, the 7th and 8th districts seized 127 vessels and about 3.4 million pounds of contraband. Of these totals, 33 vessels and about 742,000 pounds were seized by the WPBs.

Comparative performance characteristics

We analyzed 54 smuggler vessels seized under various circumstances in the 7th and 8th districts during calendar year 1978 and made a comparative analysis of the performance characteristics of Coast Guard and smuggler resources. We noted that the smuggler vessels were capable of speeds ranging from 6 to 61 knots. We identified 32 of the 54 vessels as mother ships which were capable of speeds ranging from 6 to 12 knots.



SOURCE: U.S. CUSTOMS SERVICE

The cutters and patrol boats used on drug interdiction patrols by the two districts have speed capabilities in excess of 12 knots as follows:

	<u>Speed range</u>
	(knots)
210-ft. WMEC	14 to 18
95-ft. WPB	14 to 23
82-ft. WPB	15 to 25
Small boats	14 to 27

On the basis of speed, it does not appear that the smugglers' mother ships can elude a Coast Guard cutter or patrol boat.

We identified the remaining 22 vessels as contact boats. Speeds of these boats ranged from 14 to 61 knots, most of which have the capability of avoiding seizure by a Coast Guard cutter or patrol boat. However, cutters patrolling with the support of aircraft can detect and maintain surveillance over contact boats and assist other surface vessels or resources ashore in their seizure. The effectiveness of these contact boats depends upon the success of the mother ships to evade detection and seizure by the Coast Guard.

Vessel traffic off the shores of the 7th and 8th districts is extremely heavy and includes a sizable number of types of vessels which are suitable for use as contact boats. A smuggler in a contact boat can blend into this traffic without attracting attention which would warrant a Coast Guard boarding. In view of the large number of potential contact boats off the shores of the two districts, the effective interdiction of contraband smuggled in this manner is questionable. Therefore, we believe the Coast Guard's approach of interdicting mother ships by patrolling the choke points is a reasonable strategy.

In addition to the mother ship, contact boat method of operating, smugglers also utilize vessels that are large enough to reach Colombia, return with contraband, and offload directly at such locations as small private docks or secluded coastal areas. These vessels must also traverse the choke points and therefore are subject to detection and seizure by patrolling WMECs and helicopters as well as by the WPBs closer to shore.

In addition to the speed characteristics of smuggler vessels, we analyzed the electronic equipment found on 36 of the 54 seized vessels. We compared the performance characteristics of these electronics with those of the Coast Guard and found that, overall, the Coast Guard's equipment was superior, or at least equal, to the smugglers'. Also, as illustrated below, we noted that many of the 36 vessels lacked major items of electronics necessary for effective communications, navigation, and detection capabilities.

	<u>Smuggler vessels</u>	
	<u>With equipment</u>	<u>Without equipment</u>
Radios:		
Long-range	26	10
Marine	19	17
Aircraft	1	35
Navigation and detection:		
Radar	18	18
Long-range aid to navigation (LORAN)	20	16
Fathometer	19	17
Radio direction finder	11	25

Our comparative analysis showed that all of the cutters and patrol boats engaged in drug interdiction patrols in the 7th and 8th districts were equipped with the above items. Furthermore, the electronics on the cutters and patrol boats are presently being upgraded with

- improved radar;
- more accurate navigation equipment (LORAN); and
- modern, more versatile long-range radios.

In addition to the above, our analysis showed that 23 of the 36 vessels were equipped with duplicative items of electronics. For example, one vessel was equipped with

- three long-range radios,
- four marine radios,
- two LORAN units, and
- three fathometers.

Coast Guard and Customs Service officials expressed the opinion that the duplicative items are installed for backup purposes if some unit fails to function properly while underway. They stated that smuggler crews probably do not have the capability to properly maintain or repair their electronics.

Although the performance characteristics of the smugglers' electronics are not superior to the Coast Guard's, some concern does exist regarding the smugglers' ability to monitor the communications between Coast Guard vessels and aircraft. The radio frequencies the Coast Guard uses are known to the smugglers, and as a result they listen in to gain knowledge of the Coast Guard's location and intentions. By so doing, smugglers can increase their chances of avoiding seizure. To minimize this problem, the Coast Guard has acquired voice privacy equipment which will provide short-term protection of unclassified but sensitive voice communications. Installation of this equipment began in October 1978.

COAST GUARD'S REPLACEMENT RESOURCES

The Coast Guard is acquiring the following multimission resources which will strengthen its drug enforcement role:

- A new and larger class of WMECs.
- Short-range helicopters.
- Medium-range surveillance aircraft.

Thirteen WMECs will be acquired, and they are scheduled for delivery beginning in 1980. These will replace obsolete and overaged cutters which do not have helicopter flight decks. The WMECs will be 270 feet in length and capable of 19.5-knot speeds. Their electronics will include sophisticated tracking radar and sonar capable of detecting and identifying most surface and subsurface targets at long ranges. They will have a flight deck suitable for landing all classes of Coast Guard helicopters, including the proposed replacement helicopter.

Ninety short-range helicopters, estimated for delivery beginning in 1981, will replace the aging HH-52A helicopter fleet. This replacement helicopter will have a greater range and speed than the HH-52A. Its electronics will provide modern navigation, communication, and detection capabilities.

Forty-one medium-range surveillance aircraft, scheduled for delivery beginning in 1980, will replace the HU-16E and HC-131 fleets which are scheduled for retirement. The replacement aircraft, the Falcon 20G jet, will have a greater range and speed and will be equipped with more sophisticated navigation, communication, and detection capabilities.

In addition to the above acquisitions, the Coast Guard is modernizing the 95-foot WPBs by replacing their engines to maintain the performance levels of these patrol boats and

extend their useful life at least 10 years. This modernization program began in fiscal year 1977 and is scheduled for completion by fiscal year 1983. Similarly, a modernization program to extend the useful life of the HC-130B, long-range search aircraft was under consideration at the time of our review.

NEED TO ESTABLISH A DRUG INTERDICTION GOAL

The Coast Guard's drug enforcement mission is becoming increasingly demanding in terms of the resources allotted to it. Since 1973 the number of boardings and seizures has risen sharply. Continuing significant increases are anticipated which will further burden the Coast Guard's available resources. Vessels and aircraft will be employed on drug interdiction patrols on an increasing basis, and personnel involved in carrying out this mission will be faced with increasing law enforcement actions.

While the Coast Guard has established a general goal for its law enforcement mission of detecting and deterring 75 percent of law enforcement violations over the 10-year period 1981-90, in our opinion a more fully defined drug interdiction goal is needed to measure its effectiveness. Without such a fully defined goal, the Coast Guard cannot evaluate the effectiveness of its drug enforcement resources. However, by establishing a specific goal, the Coast Guard will be able to

- assess the relative effectiveness of its drug enforcement mission and
- determine the resources needed to achieve this goal.

The Coast Guard, anticipating an increase in drug interdictions, contracted for studies to (1) determine the nature and magnitude of Coast Guard operational law enforcement requirements through the turn of the century and (2) provide the Coast Guard with a drug enforcement planning model that will provide an analytical basis for determining the types and quantities of resources to be applied to the drug law enforcement mission. These studies were not available during our review. We recognize that their results should provide the Coast Guard with a basis of knowledge whereby informed decisions may be reached to promote a more effective drug interdiction mission in the future.

Conclusions and recommendations

A comparative analysis of resources used by the Coast Guard and the drug smuggler shows that the performance characteristics of those used by the Coast Guard exceed those used by the typical smuggler. We believe the cutters and aircraft used on drug interdiction patrols provide an adequate means of detecting and seizing smuggler vessels. We agree with the Coast Guard's strategy of patrolling the principal choke points with emphasis on seizing mother ships which are capable of smuggling relatively large quantities of marijuana.

However, the Coast Guard lacks sufficient resources to effectively patrol on a continuous basis the principal choke points through which the majority of marijuana smuggled into the country must pass. The number of resources needed will depend upon what percentage of the total drugs being smuggled the Coast Guard would like to establish as its interdiction goal. The interdiction rate is estimated at 8 to 10 percent.

We recommend that the Secretary of Transportation require the Commandant of the Coast Guard to establish long-range goals as to the amount of drugs the Coast Guard would like to intercept and identify alternative approaches, acceptable time frames, and various levels of resources necessary to achieve those goals. The goals should be based on and support the overall Federal strategy for controlling drugs.

NEED FOR A COMMON LAW ENFORCEMENT RADIO FREQUENCY

The Coast Guard, Customs Service, and Drug Enforcement Administration have not been assigned a common radio frequency for use in communicating directly with one another during their drug interdiction missions. Although the agencies have adopted alternative methods to communicate with each other, we believe there is a need for the assignment of a common frequency because as drug enforcement activities increase, it would

- offer an opportunity to promote jointly planned and coordinated interdiction efforts and
- increase the effectiveness of unplanned and unexpected drug interdiction operations.

Only about 5 percent of the agencies' drug interdiction efforts are planned jointly or on a coordinated basis. The Coast Guard has been assigned a multitude of radio frequencies

covering several different frequency bands. The Coast Guard's voice communications are normally in the high frequency (HF), very high frequency (VHF), and ultra high frequency (UHF) bands. Customs Service and DEA primary voice communications are in the VHF and UHF bands, respectively; however, the frequencies assigned to them within these bands differ from those assigned the Coast Guard. Each band has unique characteristics, such as distance or lack of static or other interference, that make it suitable or unsuitable for a particular agency's needs.

Although the three agencies have not been assigned a common frequency to aid them in their drug interdiction efforts, they have adopted several methods by which they can communicate by voice with each other. These methods provide them with a communications link--particularly when they have the opportunity for advance planning on a coordinated operation. These methods provide direct and indirect communication links among the agencies and include

- sharing assigned frequencies,
- relaying messages from units by radio,
- sharing radios and personnel among the agencies,
and
- relaying radio messages to units by telephone.

The agencies are authorized to share their assigned frequencies on a temporary basis--generally when they plan a coordinated operation. For example, DEA has, on occasion, authorized Coast Guard and Customs to use its assigned frequencies. DEA officials told us that with such an arrangement, a cutter patrolling one of the choke points would be able to establish a communication link with a DEA office along the coast within 5 to 10 minutes. However, this practice of sharing assigned frequencies for use during coordinated operations requires prior planning and agreement on the specific frequency or frequencies to be used. Such an agreement between the agencies cannot be made for the unexpected or unplanned operation.

We discussed the above matters with officials of the three agencies who expressed the opinion that even though the methods of interagency communication pose no serious problems, such as delays in transmissions, they nevertheless believe a common law enforcement frequency would be of some benefit in their drug interdiction activities.

Conclusion and recommendations

While we believe the three agencies presently have adequate means to communicate with each other, we also believe a common frequency offers some opportunity to promote more effective drug interdiction efforts and increased interagency coordination. Accordingly, we recommend that the Secretary of Transportation direct the Commandant of the Coast Guard to explore the desirability of this matter and, if deemed warranted, take the necessary steps to

--acquire a common law enforcement frequency and

--adopt an interagency agreement for its effective implementation.

Agency comments

According to the Coast Guard, it, Customs, and DEA have established an interagency committee on communications to study ways to improve their communication capabilities. We believe that such an interagency study gives appropriate consideration to our recommendation.

CHAPTER 3

NEED FOR IMPROVED LAW ENFORCEMENT TRAINING

The scope and magnitude of the Coast Guard's drug enforcement mission has increased significantly over the past few years. In October 1975 the Commandant reaffirmed that marine law enforcement is one of the Coast Guard's primary missions and, as a result, law enforcement training was accelerated. Our review shows that the Coast Guard needs to

- establish qualifications for crew members engaged in boarding vessels suspected of carrying contraband and
- assure that personnel engaged in vessel boardings have proper training.

In a sense, the Coast Guard is in a "catchup" training status in law enforcement but is expanding and improving the quality of training being offered to its personnel.

LAW ENFORCEMENT TRAINING

Coast Guard personnel can receive law enforcement training through

- Maritime Law Enforcement School,
- a correspondence course provided by the Coast Guard Institute,
- area training teams,
- district training efforts, and
- on-the-job training.

The principal law enforcement training provided by the Coast Guard is conducted at its Maritime Law Enforcement School at Yorktown, Virginia. This school offers personnel a 5-week course which addresses law enforcement areas, including the problems and procedures associated with vessel boarding and drug and vessel seizure. This course prepares attending personnel to teach personnel at their home units. The course was started in January 1978, and as of November 1978, 164 personnel had attended the classes. Of this total,

14 were from the 7th district and 13 were from the 8th district. 1/ Coast Guard officials said that space limitations restrict the class size to 28 and that the space cannot be easily expanded. There are no plans to increase the number or size of classes.

The correspondence course has been available for a number of years and it covers a broad spectrum of general law enforcement topics, including boarding, search, arrest, and seizure. From January 1977 through July 1978, about 240 personnel completed the course.

The area training teams for the Atlantic and Gulf ports are headquartered in New York City. One team was formed in November 1977 and a second in October 1978 at which time the two teams started training visits to Coast Guard units in the field. Their goal is to provide a 5-day training course annually to most of the units in their area involved in law enforcement. This training will serve as a refresher course to those personnel who have attended the Maritime Law Enforcement School and provide basic law enforcement training to others. We were advised that the Coast Guard plans to start a west coast area training team by the spring of 1979.

With respect to district training efforts, the 7th district has recently formed a "training assistance" team with course material designed to provide training to its personnel in various missions, including law enforcement. The course is 2 weeks in duration and is scheduled once each month for the various units throughout the district. The first course was held September 25, 1978. The 8th district Coast Guard officials expressed an interest in pursuing a similar training effort and are currently reviewing the course material received from the 7th district.

We recognize that proficiency in boarding operations may be obtained through on-the-job training. However, we also recognize that such training exposes boarding personnel to high risks because of their lack of knowledge.

The Coast Guard plans to establish a senior officers law enforcement course for officers active in the drug enforcement mission.

1/Some additional personnel from these districts monitored the class. However, they are not involved in vessel boarding.

In addition to the above, Customs Service patrol officers have assisted in training Coast Guard personnel in boarding operations. This assistance included formal classroom training as well as informal sessions while on patrol.

Need to assure that crew members assigned to boarding parties are adequately trained and properly qualified

The principal function which generates the need for law enforcement training is the boarding operation during which crew members are faced with uncertainty and high risks associated with such activities as boarding, search, arrest, and seizure. Our review showed that many of the crew used as boarding party members had not received any training through the Maritime Law Enforcement School, the correspondence course, or the Atlantic area training team. Although boarding parties have not yet encountered violence on the vessels being boarded, it is unreasonable to assume this will not occur sometime in the future.

Further, adequate training is very important because the seizure of a vessel transporting illicit drugs and the successful prosecution of its crew requires specific knowledge in various areas of law enforcement, such as search, seizure, and arrest requirements.

In spite of the risks involved and the knowledge required, the Coast Guard has neither established a job classification for law enforcement nor adopted minimum qualifications for a crew member to become a member of a boarding party other than being qualified for small arms before a weapon is issued.

Until recently commanding officers did not have any guidance on whether or not to issue small arms to boarding parties. However, in March 1978 a weapons policy was adopted whereby a commanding officer, in dispatching a boarding party, must arm that party if there is any reason to suspect that the vessel being boarded or the persons on board are engaged in illegal activity other than violations of fishing, vessel safety, documentation, or pollution laws.

In response to this policy, increased attention is being given to small arms training and qualification. All personnel, upon entering the service, receive this training, and the Coast Guard's goal is to requalify each coastguardsman annually. However, this goal was never reached. In June 1978 the Commandant issued instructions requiring weapons

training in fiscal year 1979 for all personnel assigned to cutters and units that routinely perform drug enforcement missions.

Except for the requirements for carrying arms, the Coast Guard has not established specific criteria for boarding party crew qualifications. As a result, crew members, regardless of their training, may be involved in boarding vessels suspected of carrying contraband.

The following table illustrates the minimal training received by boarding party crew members at the 7th and 8th districts.

	Cutters					
	82 ft. (Percent)		95 ft. (Percent)		210 ft. (Percent)	
<u>7th district</u>						
Crew members serving in boarding parties	16		30		42	
Crew members who had received formal law enforcement training	9	(56.3)	10	(33.3)	5	(11.9)
<u>8th district</u>						
Crew members serving in boarding parties	<u>a</u> /32		(b)		<u>c</u> /24	
Crew members who had received formal law enforcement training	8	(25.0)	(b)		12	(50.0)

a/ Data based on 8 of 10 cutters.

b/ There are no 95-foot cutters in the 8th district.

c/ Data based on 3 of 4 cutters.

The above table shows that a low percentage of crew members who were on boarding parties received little law enforcement training. However, most boarding parties

included at least one crew member, usually the boarding officer, who is qualified.

The Coast Guard has a rotation policy for its staff among various duty stations (e.g., search and rescue, buoy tenders, high- and medium-endurance cutters) every 2 to 3 years. Staff are trained to perform specialized jobs (e.g., boatswain mate, machinery technician), so that as members rotate, trained and experienced individuals will be available as replacements. Promotions are based on experience, performance, and expertise in a specialized job.

The Coast Guard has not established a specialized job classification for its law enforcement mission activities. As a result, the Coast Guard cannot ensure that sufficient numbers of experienced and trained staff are in the enforcement area. Because promotions are based on expertise, performance, and experience in areas other than enforcement, such duty can be detrimental to staff members' Coast Guard careers. Staff often rotate to other duty which does not effectively use their enforcement experience and training. As staff rotate out of the enforcement area their experience is lost, especially since replacement staff need training and the Coast Guard has not been able to meet their training needs.

The Coast Guard has a special billet qualification system. Through this system the Coast Guard can keep track of individuals who develop expertise in a special area and the various billets requiring such expertise.

We recognize that there are alternative approaches for retaining qualified personnel in the enforcement program. We believe improvements should be realized from the new system now in use to (1) keep track of qualified personnel who develop expertise in a special area and (2) use such information to reassign personnel to billets needing law enforcement expertise. We believe that establishing a separate enlisted rating for the law enforcement mission position, however, would be a more effective method of retaining experienced personnel for such activities because the individuals would have (1) professional advancement opportunities in their speciality and (2) an incentive to maintain job knowledge even when not on law enforcement assignments. We believe that individuals with this speciality rating--when reassigned to law enforcement areas--would provide continuity of required skills as others leave and would provide such continuity without additional training.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The Coast Guard does not have a sufficient number of trained personnel who are performing duties in the law

enforcement mission relating to drug interdiction. Although steps have been taken to provide this training, the Coast Guard is currently in a catchup status and may remain so for an extended period of time. Further acceleration of training efforts is warranted, particularly in view of the anticipated increase in drug interdictions. As drug trafficking increases, more boardings will occur and crew members will encounter increased risk of injury or death. To minimize this, they must be formally trained in the techniques of law enforcement to deal with those problems related to boarding, search, seizure, and arrest. In addition to training, and in recognition of the results of the studies describing the magnitude of the Coast Guard's enforcement mission (see ch. 2), it may seem reasonable to establish a specialized law enforcement job classification. At a minimum, standards should be established whereby personnel who are used in boarding operations are qualified through an accepted level of training.

We recommend that the Secretary of Transportation direct the Commandant of the Coast Guard to

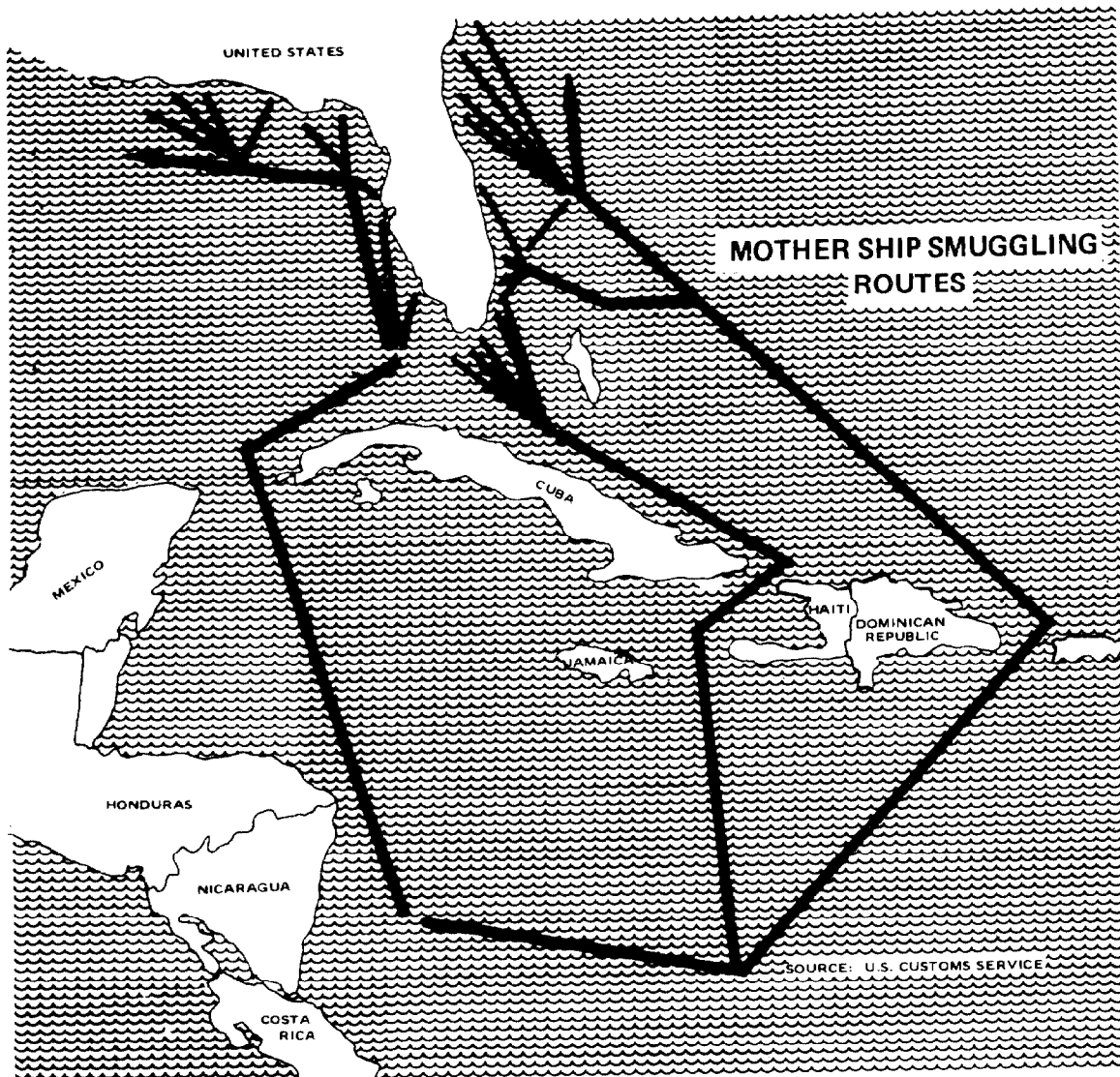
- further accelerate training efforts, in particular those provided at the Maritime Law Enforcement School;
- consider establishing a specialized law enforcement job classification to provide the expert leadership needed in drug enforcement activities--a level of skill above that of other personnel; and
- establish a standard by which personnel may be considered qualified for boarding operations.

GENERAL CHARACTERISTICS OFSELECTED COAST GUARDCUTTERS AND AIRCRAFT

<u>Cutters</u>	<u>Length</u> (feet)	<u>Maximum range</u> (nautical miles)	<u>Economical speed</u> (knots)	<u>Maximum speed</u> (knots)
WHEC	311 to 378	8,000 to 20,000	10 to 11	19.8 to 29.0
WMEC	143 to 230	6,100 to 22,000	7 to 14	13.5 to 18.0
WPB	82 to 95	1,200 to 3,000	8 to 9	20.0 to 23.7

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<u>Aircraft</u>	<u>Maximum range</u> (nautical miles)	<u>Cruise speed</u> (knots)	<u>Maximum speed</u> (knots)
Long-range search (HC-130B)	2,900	290	325
Long-range search (HC-130H)	4,600	300	325
Medium-range search (HC-16)	1,500	170	266
Medium-range search (HC-131)	1,800	145	254
Medium-range recovery (HH-3F)	850	126	142
Short-range recovery (HH-52A)	300	80	109



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June 30, 1978

Honorable Elmer B. Staats
 Comptroller General of the
 United States
 441 "G" Street
 Washington, D.C. 20548

Dear Mr. Staats:

The epidemic rise in international narcotics trafficking into the United States has focused attention on the Coast Guard's role as the primary Federal maritime law enforcement agency with border management responsibilities along the nation's sea frontiers and superjacent airspace. The Subcommittee on Coast Guard and Navigation has been conducting an intensive investigation into the present and future operational requirements placed upon the Coast Guard by virtue of the necessity for increased efforts in seaborne drug interdiction.

The Subcommittee is especially concerned that the operational capabilities of the present mix of Coast Guard assets (including ships, aircraft, and equipment) and the present state of Coast Guard training and readiness may be inadequate for the conduct of effective law enforcement.

Specifically, our investigation has revealed that existing high-endurance and medium-endurance cutters, slated for eventual replacement by a new class of vessels -- even when deployed with helicopters, may lack the speed necessary to intercept fast "load boats" and "mother ships" on the high seas. In addition, the sensor, navigation, and communication suite used by drug traffickers is in many instances far superior to standard Coast Guard equipment.

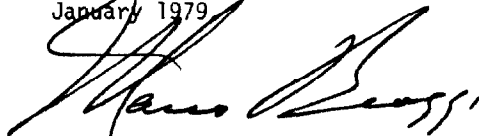
Further, of more serious concern is the lack of a common covered law enforcement frequency for use by Drug Enforcement Administration, Customs Service, and Coast Guard ships and aircraft while engaged in drug law enforcement. The Subcommittee, therefore, is interested in having the General Accounting Office assist us in evaluating Coast Guard operational capability in the conduct of effective maritime law enforcement.

Honorable Elmer B. Staats
June 30, 1978
Page Two

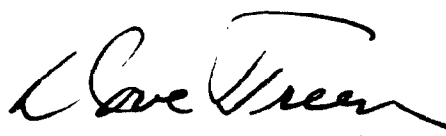
Such a determination should include an analysis of the performance characteristics of the present and future inventory of 253 Coast Guard cutters over 65 feet in length, 55 fixed-wing aircraft, and 115 helicopters -- and of the adequacy of ancillary sensor, communication, and navigation equipment. This evaluation should also address overall Coast Guard operational ability to detect, classify, track, board, and capture suspected contraband-carrying vessels and aircraft on the high seas. Identification of limitations in performance of such assets and equipment and recommendations for their modification or replacement, or the recommended addition of new types of assets or equipment, would be especially useful to the Subcommittee. An appraisal of the current status of Coast Guard law enforcement training and readiness should also be included in this requested review.

It is anticipated that, while you may need to rely on the expertise of other Federal and non-Federal sources, the scope of the study should be limited to Coast Guard law enforcement capability.

We would like to be periodically briefed on your efforts. In order to incorporate the findings, conclusions, and recommendations of your report into our consideration of the Fiscal Year 1980 Coast Guard budget submission, we would like to receive the final report by the end of January 1979.



MARIO BIAGGI, Chairman
Subcommittee on Coast Guard
and Navigation



DAVID C. TREAN, Ranking Minority Member
Subcommittee on Coast Guard
and Navigation

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