



## All Hands Messages

### *Self Propelled Semi-Submersibles*

To the Men and Women of the Coast Guard:

I'm proud to tell you that over the past five days, Pacific Area Coast Guard units, with the help of our U.S. Navy and interagency partners, seized over 14 tons of cocaine from two Self-Propelled Semi-Submersible (SPSS) vessels in the Eastern Pacific Ocean. On 13 September, a Navy maritime patrol aircraft (MPA) detected an SPSS in international waters and vectored a Navy ship, with a Pacific Area Law Enforcement Detachment (LEDET), to intercept it. After conducting an unannounced nighttime boarding, the LEDET discovered 7 tons of cocaine. Then on 17 September, another Navy MPA detected an SPSS and vectored the cutter MIDGETT to investigate. MIDGETT's boarding team subsequently discovered an additional 7 tons of cocaine. SPSS vessels have become the conveyance of choice for narcotics smugglers. I have attached a background paper on these vessels so you can understand the unique challenges they present to our law enforcement personnel.

Congratulations to LEDET 404 and MIDGETT for making these seizures, and to the Pacific Area and Eleventh District staffs for coordinating the interagency law enforcement process. Their courage, dedication and professional expertise prevented these dangerous drugs from reaching American cities. The interoperability between Coast Guard and Navy assets has never been more effective. Our DOD and interagency partners are a critical force multiplier making such interdictions possible. We will continue to enhance those relationships. As satisfying as it is to tell you about these seizures, we need to understand that SPSS vessels represent a much larger threat.

The SPSS seized on 13 September was the most sophisticated one we have ever detected. Its propulsion, steering, and exhaust systems were much more advanced than earlier versions and its electronic suite rivaled those found on professionally constructed commercial vessels. SPSS vessels are built solely for illicit purposes and it's obvious that transnational criminal networks are investing heavily in this technology.

To date, SPSS vessels have been used to smuggle cocaine from South America to the United States but they could be converted to smuggle terrorists or weapons of mass destruction. Through current legislation pending in the Congress, we are trying to criminalize the operation of stateless SPSS vessels on international voyages. This will allow us to prosecute SPSS operators, deter the use of these vessels for other illicit purposes and increase the safety of Coast Guard boarding teams.

This vessel is just one of the many global maritime threats we deal with on a daily basis. We will continue to work across the federal government and through the international community to develop solutions to new challenges that demand our ingenuity, dedication and commitment. It's an exciting time to be in the Coast Guard. Every Active Duty member, Reservist, Civilian or Auxiliarist, whether stationed at an operational unit or directly supporting one, plays a critical role in protecting, saving and defending the American public. Thank you for being a Guardian.

Admiral Thad Allen  
Commandant, U.S. Coast Guard

