

Royal Navy seizes £17m of cocaine in Caribbean drug bust

COCAINE worth more than £17 million has been seized by the Royal Navy's Caribbean Task Group – less than 24 hours into the first drugs patrol of their deployment.

Support ship RFA Wave Knight intercepted the suspect craft as it transited international waters near South America.

Despite efforts by the suspected traffickers to dump their cargo overboard, eight bales were recovered from the sea. Weighed and tested, they proved to be 216kg of cocaine with an estimated UK street value of £17.28 million.

Armed Forces Minister James Heappey said:

This successful operation, which deprived criminal gangs of over £17 million, is another example of the determination, versatility and effectiveness of the Royal Navy wherever it is deployed around the world.

Whether protecting the UK's shores, providing hurricane and disaster relief for the people of the Caribbean or working with our US partners to prevent international drug traffickers plying their deadly trade, our brave servicemen and women prove their worth time and again.

The bust began when the Royal Fleet Auxiliary ship launched her Wildcat helicopter – callsign Knightrider – on a routine patrol.

Minutes later Knightrider's crew reported a small craft with three people on board and large objects on deck. Having been ordered to stop by Knightrider, the suspected drug-runners then began throwing bales overboard.

The ship closed in and launched her smaller sea boat, carrying the embarked US Coast Guard Law Enforcement Detachment (LEDET), to intercept the vessel and detain its occupants.

More than 200kg of drugs were recovered and the crew of the boat detained. They will be handed over to the US authorities.

The vessel was then destroyed to prevent it becoming a danger to other seafarers.

Captain Simon Herbert RFA, Commanding Officer of RFA Wave Knight at the time, said:

I am extremely proud of the professionalism and dedication of all on-board RFA Wave Knight – that includes 213 Flight, Royal Marines, Royal Navy and the US Coast Guard LEDET – which led to the seizure of these illegal drugs.

In doing so they've contributed to the reassurance and protection of UK Overseas Territories, as well as keeping these narcotics off the streets of the UK.

RFA Wave Knight is deployed as part of the UK's Caribbean Task Group, working alongside the patrol ship HMS Medway, which is the UK's permanent presence in the region.

The ship's main role is to provide support to British Overseas Territories in the event of a natural disaster, with peak hurricane season running from August to November. This year RFA Wave Knight has already delivered over 75 tonnes of aid to St Vincent following the volcanic eruption in April.

The task group also works alongside regional navies, authorities and police forces – especially the US Coast Guard – to tackle criminal activity across the Caribbean. Last year Royal Navy ships and helicopters in the Caribbean – again working side-by-side with US authorities – seized cocaine worth nearly £400 million.