Coast Guard Cutter Steadfast returns home following counternarcotics patrol



Release from the United States Coast Guard

*****

March 16, 2023

ASTORIA, Ore. – The Coast Guard Cutter Steadfast (WMEC 623) and crew returned to their Astoria homeport, Tuesday, following a 69-day counternarcotics patrol in the Eastern Pacific Ocean.

Steadfast's crew disrupted the flow of illegal narcotics on three separate occasions during their patrol preventing a combined total of more than 7,500 pounds of cocaine, valued at $85.6 million, from reaching the U.S. maritime borders.

The crew steamed more than 12,000 nautical miles conducting training, law enforcement missions, providing search-and-rescue coverage, and conducting helicopter operations while patrolling the waters from their Astoria homeport to international waters off the coast of Central America.

The Steadfast deployed with a Jacksonville, Florida, based Helicopter Interdiction Tactical Squadron MH-65 Dolphin helicopter and aircrew along with temporarily assigned crewmembers from the Coast Guard Cutter Harriet Lane (WMEC 903), and soon-to-be-commissioned Coast Guard Cutter Argus (WMSM 915).

During nighttime patrol operations, Steadfast personnel were notified by a Maritime Patrol Aircraft (MPA) of a suspected narcotics-smuggling vessel transiting international waters. Steadfast personnel launched an Over-the-Horizon (OTH) crew and boarding team who interdicted the vessel after a multi-hour pursuit. The suspected smugglers jettisoned contraband, resulting in the disruption of 2,260 pounds of cocaine, valued at $25.6 million.

Additionally, Steadfast’s crew tracked another suspected narcotics-smuggling vessel with the assistance of a Mexican Navy (SEMAR) surveillance aircraft and aircrew. Steadfast personnel launched an OTH boat crew and HITRON helicopter aircrew while the Mexican MPA tracked the vessel. Steadfast’s small boat and helicopter crews interdicted the suspected narcotics-smuggling vessel and seized 3,300 pounds of cocaine valued at $37.5 million.

“The successful coordination between a U.S. Coast Guard cutter and Mexican MPA was a significant step in advancing our strategic partnerships in combatting the flow of illicit narcotics in Eastern Pacific,” said Cmdr. Brock S. Eckel, Steadfast’s commanding officer.

The next day, Steadfast crew launched an OTH boat crew and HITRON aircrew to intercept another suspected smuggling vessel. The aircrew located the suspected smuggling vessel and worked with a nearby Mexican Naval vessel to vector in a Mexican Naval helicopter. This multi-national effort resulted in the seizure of 1,984 pounds of cocaine valued at $22.5 million.

“From battling heavy seas off the Oregon and California coasts, to overcoming equipment casualties, and multiple smuggling vessel interdictions in the darkest of nights, the determination, resilience, and professionalism of the Steadfast crew was simply exceptional,” said Eckel. “The crew’s operational success was matched only by the strengthening of international and inter-agency relationships along the way. Steadfast’s crew once again proved their proficiency in working with partner nations jointly executing the counternarcotics mission successfully.”

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 for these interdictions by United States Attorney’s Offices throughout the country.

Commissioned in 1968, Steadfast is one of two 210-foot medium endurance cutters homeported in Astoria. The cutter and crew deploy along the western seaboard of North and Central America enforcing living marine resource laws and regulations, detecting and interdicting narcotics and migrant smuggling, and conducting search-and-rescue operations.