

Northland Returns Home after 80-day Eastern Pacific Patrol, Miami Drug Offload



Coast Guard Cutter Northland crews rescued three people after their boat caught fire approximately 150 miles south of Golfito, Costa Rica, August 18, 2021. Maritime Rescue Coordination Centre Costa Rica contacted 11th Coast Guard District command center watchstanders to relay the report of a vessel fire and requested Coast Guard assistance. *U.S. COAST GUARD*

PORTSMOUTH, Va. – USCGC Northland (WMEC 904) returned to Portsmouth Sept. 13, following an 80-day patrol in the Eastern Pacific Ocean in support of the Coast Guard 11th District and Joint Interagency Task Force South, the Coast Guard Atlantic Area said in a Sept. 15 release.

The Northland's crew patrolled the Eastern Pacific performing counter-drug operations with the support of an aviation detachment from the U.S. Coast Guard Helicopter Interdiction Tactical Squadron flying an MH-65 Dolphin Helicopter. In addition to Northland's HITRON detachment, aircraft crews from the U.S. Navy and Customs and Border Protection provided critical aerial surveillance and reconnaissance for the cutter throughout the patrol.

During the patrol, Northland successfully interdicted several suspected drug smuggling vessels. On Sept. 8, the cutter pulled into U.S. Coast Guard Base Miami Beach and offloaded 7,833 pounds of cocaine with an estimated street value of \$148 million. The cutter crew also transferred three suspected narcotics smugglers to Coast Guard Seventh District and U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration personnel, signaling the culmination of a successful joint interagency effort in the

Eastern Pacific.

Aside from successfully interdicting suspected drug smuggling vessels, Northland maintained a maritime assistance presence in the region throughout the patrol. On Aug. 11, the Coast Guard Eleventh District relayed an alert from the Maritime Rescue Coordination Center Costa Rica reporting the fishing vessel Baula X on fire with three mariners trapped aboard. On Aug. 18, Northland launched the Dolphin crew in search of the boat. Upon successfully locating the burning fishing vessel, the helicopter crew guided Northland's small boat team to the location. They safely rescued the three fishers and delivered them to the nearby cargo vessel Avra GR, participating in the Automated Mutual-Assistance Vessel Rescue program.

When not actively chasing drug runners or rescuing fishers, Northland maintained a steady training regimen for new and veteran crewmembers on navigation, engineering, and nautical activities. Training for emergencies and routine operations is critical to sustaining Northland's peak mission effectiveness and is in keeping with the Coast Guard's motto, Semper Paratus – Always Ready.

"During this patrol, our crew showed terrific adaptability when responding to equipment malfunctions, scheduling changes, issues spurred by the COVID-19 pandemic, and a litany of other challenges faced. Throughout all of this, the crew displayed tremendous determination and teamwork, resulting in multiple mission accomplishments. I am extremely proud of the effort put forth by Northland, our embarked aviation detachment, and all of the support elements that worked to ensure our safety and success throughout," said Cmdr. Patricia M. Bennett, Northland's commanding officer.

USCGC Northland is a 270-foot Famous-class medium-endurance cutter homeported in Portsmouth. The crew routinely deploys in support of counter-drug, migrant interdiction, fisheries, search and rescue, and homeland security missions.