

Polar Star Completes 123-Day Antarctic Treaty Inspection, Resupply Mission



Rear Adm. Jack Vogt, commander of the 13th Coast Guard District, welcomes the crew of Polar Star to Seattle on March 25. U.S. Coast Guard/Public Affairs Specialist 3rd Class Michael Clark

SEATTLE – The 150-member crew of the U.S. Coast Guard Cutter Polar Star returned March 25 to their homeport of Seattle following a 123-day deployment to Antarctica in support of Operation Deep Freeze, the Coast Guard Pacific Area said.

This mission marks the Polar Star's 23rd journey to Antarctica in support of Operation Deep Freeze, an annual joint military service mission to resupply U.S. Antarctic stations, in support of the National Science Foundation, the lead agency for the Antarctic program. This year also marks the 63rd iteration of the operation.

The Polar Star crew departed Seattle on Nov. 27 for their sixth deployment in as many years and traveled more than 26,350 miles through the North Pacific, South Pacific, Indian and Southern Oceans.

"I am very proud of the tenacity of this Polar Star crew."

Capt. Greg Stanclik, commanding officer of the Polar Star

In the Southern Ocean, the crew travelled through nearly 500 miles of pack ice and broke through 23 miles of fast ice in order to create a nearly 18-square-mile navigable channel to McMurdo Station, Antarctica. Because of the efforts of the Polar Star crew, two resupply vessels and one tanker travelled to McMurdo Station unescorted in order to refuel and resupply

U.S. Antarctic stations.

This year's operation required the construction of a temporary, modular mobile causeway to replace an ice pier, which disintegrated during Operation Deep Freeze 2018-2019. The modular pier required a three-day construction period prior to the offload of supplies, followed by a three-day deconstruction period at the conclusion of the mission.

Three resupply ships required 23 days to offload 19.6 million pounds of cargo and 7.6 million gallons of fuel during this year's operation, more than doubling the operation duration and capacity as previous years. Together, the three ships delivered enough fuel and critical supplies to sustain NSF operations throughout the year until Polar Star returns in 2021.

Among the cargo offloaded were construction materials for a five-year, \$460 million Antarctica Infrastructure Modernization for Science (AIMS) project to recapitalize McMurdo Station, South Pole Station and other American outposts on the continent.

Additionally, the Polar Star crew also supported a team of U.S. government officials from the State Department, National Science Foundation, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration and U.S. Coast Guard who conducted a five-day inspection of foreign research stations, installations and equipment in Antarctica.

The team inspected three stations: Mario Zucchelli (Italy), Jang Bogo (South Korea) and Inexpressible Island (China). This was the 15th inspection of foreign research stations by the United States in Antarctica and the first since 2012.

Inspections emphasize all of Antarctica is accessible to interested countries despite territorial claims and reinforce the importance of compliance with the Antarctic Treaty's arms control provisions. The U.S. will present its report on the

inspection at the next Antarctic Treaty Consultative Meeting in Helsinki, Finland, in May 2020.

“I am very proud of the tenacity of this Polar Star crew,” said Coast Guard Capt. Greg Stanclik, commanding officer of the Polar Star. “158 crew members earned the Antarctic Service Medal during Operation Deep Freeze 2020.”