U.S. Coast Guard Cutter Polar Star Departs Australia, En Route to Antarctica



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Editor's Note: To follow the U.S. Coast Guard Cutter Polar Star's Operation Deep Freeze journey, click here for more imagery.

HOBART, Australia – U.S. Coast Guard Cutter Polar Star (WAGB 10) and crew departed Hobart, Wednesday, after a four-day port call in Hobart and an earlier stop in Sydney, to begin the

journey across the Southern Ocean en route to Antarctica in support of Operation Deep Freeze 2024.

While in Hobart and Sydney, the crew hosted tours aboard the Polar Star for guests from the U.S. Embassy including U.S. Ambassador for Australia Caroline Kennedy and members from the Australian government, Royal Australian Navy, Tasmanian government, local industry partners, and local schools and universities.

“A sincere thank you to our Australian hosts and all our international partners whose incredible collaboration has defined the success of Operation Deep Freeze,” said Capt. Keith Ropella, commanding officer of Polar Star. “The cohesion among Antarctic programs reinforces the significance of our joint efforts, fostering a legacy of success for future scientific endeavors in this challenging environment.”

Operation Deep Freeze is a joint military service mission to resupply the United States Antarctic stations of the National Science Foundation, who is the lead agency for the United States Antarctic program (USAP). This year marks Polar Star’s 27th voyage to Antarctica. Every year, a joint and total force team work together to complete a successful Operation Deep Freeze season. Military members from the U.S. Air Force, Army, Coast Guard, and Navy work together through Joint Task Force-Support Forces Antarctica to continue the tradition of providing U.S. military support. Operation Deep Freeze works closely with other Antarctic programs to include those of Australia and New Zealand, as well as those Nations’ respective defense forces.

Leading up to and during the transit, the crew received training and prepared themselves to support this vital mission despite the austere environment. Operation Deep Freeze is one of the more challenging U.S. military peacetime missions due to the harsh environment in which it is conducted. Antarctica is the coldest, windiest, most inhospitable continent on the

planet, and each trip requires careful planning and coordination.

“Through rigorous training and specialized preparations, our Coast Guard team stands ready for the challenges of Operation Deep Freeze,” said Lt. Cmdr. Don Rudnickas, operations officer of Polar Star. “The Coast Guard’s unwavering commitment underscores our dedication to the success of U.S. missions in the Polar Regions, ensuring the safety and efficacy of our operations.”

The Polar Star provides heavy icebreaking capabilities to facilitate sealift, seaport access, bulk fuel supply, and port cargo handling for three U.S. research stations in Antarctica with McMurdo Station being the largest. The cutter’s icebreaking capabilities enable the safe delivery of critical supplies to sustain USAP’s year-round operations and support international partnership in the harsh Antarctic environment. It’s vitally important that the U.S. maintains a maritime domain presence in Antarctica to protect uninhibited international access to the region.

When the Polar Star deploys in support of Operation Deep Freeze, they routinely spend the holiday season away from home. During the cutter’s first stop in Honolulu, the crew celebrated Thanksgiving while underway and moored alongside the U.S. Navy fleet at Joint Base Pearl Harbor-Hickam in Honolulu.

During the transit across the Pacific, the crew sailed through the position 0 degrees latitude and 180 degrees longitude, also known as “The X” marking the intersection of the equator and international date line. Crossing this exact position is a unique and rare opportunity among Coast Guard crews.

On December 10, the Polar Star moored at HMAS Kuttabul alongside several Royal Australian Navy ships close to the

center of Sydney during a logistics stop for fuel and supplies.

The Polar Star departed its Seattle homeport November 15 and has traveled approximately 7,700 miles with stops in Honolulu, Sydney and Hobart.

The Polar Star is the United States’ only asset capable of providing access to both Polar Regions. It is a 399-foot heavy polar icebreaker commissioned in 1976, weighing 13,500 tons, 84-feet wide, with a 34-foot draft. The six diesel and three gas turbine engines produce up to 75,000 horsepower.