USCGC Polar Star Crew Concludes Operation Deep Freeze 2025, Departs Antarctica



The crew of U.S. Coast Guard Cutter Polar Star (WAGB 10) stand for a photo while the cutter is hove-to in McMurdo Sound during Operation Deep Freeze, Jan. 7, 2025. (U.S. Coast Guard photo by Petty Officer 2nd Class Briana Carter)
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SOUTHERN OCEAN – Accomplishing its missions, the U.S. Coast Guard Cutter Polar Star (WAGB 10) and crew departed the Antarctic region Tuesday, after 65 days south of the Antarctic Circle in support of Operation Deep Freeze 2025.

Operation Deep Freeze is an annual event, led by the U.S. Antarctic Program (USAP) in conjunction with the Department of

Defense, to support the U.S. National Science Foundation (NSF). The USAP advances the nation's goals to support the Antarctic Treaty, fosters cooperative research with other nations, protects Antarctic resources, and develops measures to ensure the wise use of those resources.

Operation Deep Freeze showcases a complex symphony of strategic inter-theater airlift, tactical intra-theater airlift and airdrop, aeromedical evacuation support, search and rescue response, sealift, seaport access, bulk fuel supply, port cargo handling, and transportation requirements. Polar Star's crew performed icebreaking duties in McMurdo Sound, clearing routes to ensure safe passage for cargo vessels for McMurdo Station and New Zealand's Scott Base.

"The surface ice conditions in McMurdo Sound were abnormally light this year, a welcome change of pace from the extreme conditions experienced last year," said Capt Jeff Rasnake, Polar Star's commanding officer. "Operation Deep Freeze presented a number of challenges, beyond those inherent in maintaining and operating a 49-year-old ship to complete this arduous mission. We benefitted tremendously from a great deployment plan which allowed us to take advantage of favorable conditions and use the elements to stay ahead of events without pressing the cutter or crew excessively. That up-front planning made a big difference."

Polar Star also conducted a crew exchange with the New Zealand Defense Force ship Aotearoa.

"Operation Deep Freeze works closely with other Antarctic programs to include those of New Zealand and Australia, as well as their respective defense forces," said Lt. Cmdr. Rachel Rand, Polar Star's operations officer. "The ability to collaborate with others to achieve mission success and ensure the United States' vital interests in the Polar regions makes this assignment so unique."

Polar Star also worked with the Commission for the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources (CCAMLR) to support a secure and sustainable Southern Ocean. Polar Star was the first United States surface asset to support CCAMLR. The crew's efforts to observe and monitor fishing and other activity on the high seas safeguarded resources and U.S. national interests in the Antarctic region.

"Each trip to Antarctica for Operation Deep Freeze requires careful planning and coordination due to the extreme weather and inhospitable environment," said Rasnake. "The joint-agency teamwork within Joint Task Force – Support Forces Antarctica this year was outstanding and certainly lived up to the proud tradition of U.S. military support to the U.S. Antarctic Program in promoting security and stability across the region."

The crew has transited nearly 16,000 miles since departing its Seattle homeport in November with stops in Honolulu, Sydney, and McMurdo Station. Polar Star celebrated its 49th year of Service to the Nation and visited Cape Polar Star in the northern part of the Ross Sea. Cape Polar Star was named after Polar Star for the scientific support provided by the cutter in the area during Operation Deep Freeze 86.

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