

OPERATION DEEP FREEZE USCGC POLAR STAR 1983

It took 7,773 miles and 69 days around the coldest and most desolate continent on earth for the POLAR STAR and her 165-man crew to complete her Antarctic mission.

The crew had indeed accomplished several missions with complete success, including becoming the first Coast Guard icebreaker, and perhaps the first U.S. ship, to circumnavigate the Antarctic continent south of the 60-degree parallel.

The massive red breaker departed her Seattle homeport October 19th. Prior to her "Operation Deep Freeze 1983" job, the crew had to complete three weeks of intensive training with the Navy in San Diego. There, POLAR STAR achieved letter "E's" for excellence in engineering and seamanship. According to Capt. Joe Smith, POLAR STAR skipper, this was the first time a Polar-Class breaker has been able to earn an excellent in engineering.

The 399-foot icebreaker arrived at the United States Research Station Palmer, located on the northern Antarctic Peninsula, December 23rd and immediately began transferring the 120,000 gallons of fuel for the station. Early the next day the crew was busily off-loading some 350 tons of scientific gear, food and other needed supplies for the station's "winter over" party. For four days, including Christmas Day, the crew worked to get the supplies over to the station. On December 26th, a special turkey dinner was prepared to celebrate Christmas and it was back to work again. On the following day, the ship set sail for McMurdo Station, the largest of the United States' four outposts in Antarctica. The mission of McMurdo was to break a path through Winter Quarter's Bay so that Navy supply ships could get into the station. POLAR STAR took 36 hours to break the initial path into the station. For the next three days the ship moved in and out of the bay in an effort to widen the ice-clogged channel. On January 20th, the USNS MAUMEE was escorted in. On the following day, POLAR STAR began her long and lonesome trek around Antarctica.

The STAR's task was to transport a special team of State Department people to selected foreign research stations. The team's mission was to inspect these stations and ensure adherence to the Antarctic Treaty that was signed in 1959. The observers looked for such items as nuclear weapons, fortification of the stations, dumping of radio-active waste and any other warlike activities, which are all prohibited according to the treaty. Fourteen outposts were inspected including stations from Argentina, France, Japan, United Kingdom, Australia, West Germany, South Africa and Soviet Union. Although Coast Guard icebreakers have been used to transport all six previous inspection teams, this was the first time a Coast Guard vessel has been used to carry a team all the way around the continent.

Deep Freeze '83 also enabled the scientific community to further its knowledge. For the first time, complete censuses of Antarctic whales, seals and birds were accomplished. Extensive studies were also conducted on plankton species.

Only seven ships, all foreign, have accomplished a complete circumnavigation of the Antarctic continent. In 1795, Captain Cook finished the first circum-polar voyage of the Antarctic. For Capt. Cook, it took three years. For the men of POLAR STAR it took less than three months. After 196 days and 32,112 nautical miles, POLAR STAR completed her historic voyage and pulled into Seattle for homeport "R&R."