Military Sealift Command Continues Support to Operation Deep Freeze 2025

By Feb. 26, 2025

MCMURDO STATION, Antarctica – The Military Sealift Command chartered ship MV Ocean Gladiator is conducting a cargo offload of supplies at McMurdo Station, Antarctica in support of the annual resupply mission Operation Deep Freeze (ODF) 2025.

The second of two MSC chartered ships supporting ODF 2025, Ocean Gladiator arrived at McMurdo Station on Feb. 20, where they were met by members of Navy Cargo Handling Battalion ONE and began conducting the offload. The ship is delivering 321 pieces of cargo, consisting of containers filled with mechanical parts, vehicles, construction materials including cement pilings for a pier project, food, electronics equipment and comfort items; supplies needed to sustain the next year of operations at McMurdo Station, Antarctica.

Following the offload, Ocean Gladiator will be loaded with 149 containers of retrograde cargo for transportation off the continent. This includes trash and recyclable materials for disposal and equipment no longer required on the station, as well as the 65-ton floating Modular Causeway System, which has been used in lieu of the ice-pier for cargo operations. Before departing McMurdo station, Ocean Gladiator will be loaded with ice core samples that will be stored on the ship in a sub-zero freezer. The ice core samples will be delivered to the United States for scientific study.
Logistics moves are nothing new for MSC, in fact, they are almost a daily occurrence. Moving cargo in the harshest

environment on Earth is a mission unto itself, as Marie Morrow, MSC's ship liaison to the Joint Support Forces Antarctica staff can attest. On her third ODF mission, she has become something of an expert on how to move cargo while moored next to an ice-pier or a movable causeway, in sub zero temperatures and with high winds that whip over a snow-covered mountain and across an island.

Working in Antarctica wasn't something Morrow had even considered when she came to work at MSC's Pacific area command, MSCPAC. In fact, a job in San Diego seemed like the perfect place to be, for someone who doesn't like the cold.

"I thought, San Diego, Southern California, that is exactly what I'm looking for," said Morrow. "Then I got assigned to go to Antarctica. It wasn't something I was looking for, or had even thought about to be honest, but, I really enjoy this mission. It is an experience that I share with only a very few people."

Few world travelers ever get the coveted passport stamp for all seven continents. Access to Antarctica is strictly controlled. As Morrow explained, the journey to the southern most part of the planet isn't an easy, or short commute. Morrow's journey began in San Diego, with a flight to San Francisco, followed by an 14-hour flight to New Zealand, and then an 8-hour flight on a military C-130, sitting in a mesh cargo seat.

On the ice, Morrow serves as part of a team consisting of representatives of numerous government agencies including the National Science Foundation, Coast Guard, Navy, Army, Coast Guard. All working together to ensure a successful mission.

"Nothing can happen without all of us working together," said Morrow. "It is super cooperative and interoperative."

Everyone who is part of the ODF mission live in barracks at McMurdo Station, or on the ships. Life is communal with shared rooms and a dining hall. Those supporting the mission get to know each other personally and, like a combat unit, create their own support structure for each other.

“Being at McMurdo Station is like being at summer camp for adults,” laughed Morrow. “It’s a very tight-knit group of people, working and living in a challenging environment. We get very close.”

Weather is a constant factor in Antarctica. The continent is known for its extreme environment, particularly subzero temperatures and high winds. February is summertime in the Southern Hemisphere. In this small window of just a few weeks, ODF takes place. And while it is summer, temperatures on the ice still hover around freezing during the day and below zero at night. Cargo operations can move forward, despite the temperatures, but high winds can put a pause on work for hours, with the ships’ cranes unable to move cargo in winds over 25 knots.

“The weather is everything,” explained Morrow. “The Southern Ocean is the most unforgiving and treacherous water way on Earth. The weather can keep flights and ships from coming into port. The weather can put the offload on pause. This can mean that some of the cargo may not be offloaded. It is the National Science Foundation who has to make the decisions on how to stay inside the mission window.”

With all the challenges and unpredictabilities of the ODF missions, those who support these operations come away with a feeling of being a part of something special and important, something outside the normal course of their job description.

“I never thought I would get to go on a mission to Antarctica,” said Morrow. “But I love going to McMurdo

Station, and I’m proud to be a part of it and to represent MSC.”

Following operations in Antarctica, Ocean Gladiator will travel to Japan to deliver the floating modular causeway, before sailing for Port Hueneme, Calif., where they will offload cargo, completing their mission.

Operation Deep Freeze is a joint service, on-going Defense Support to Civilian Authorities mission in support of the National Science Foundation (NSF). NSF is the lead agency for the United States Antarctic Program. Mission support consists of active duty, Guard and Reserve personnel from the U.S. Air Force, Navy, Army, and Coast Guard as well as Department of Defense civilians and attached non-DOD civilians. ODF operates from two primary locations situated at Christchurch, New Zealand and McMurdo Station, Antarctica. MSC-chartered ships have made the challenging voyage to Antarctica every year since the station and its resupply mission were established in 1955.