MV OCEAN GIANT COMPLETES OPERATION DEEP FREEZE CARGO OPERATIONS AT MCMURDO STATION ANTARCTICA

By Sarah Cannon, Military Sealift Command Pacific Public Affairs

Sailors from Navy Cargo Handling Battalion (NCHB) 1 and NCHB-5 offload shipping containers from the Military Sealift Command-chartered cargo ship MV Ocean Gladiator at McMurdo Station, Antarctica. (U.S. Navy photo by Senior Chief Mass Communication Specialist RJ Stratchko)

MV Ocean Giant continued on page 8
SECNAV RENAMES PATHFINDER-CLASS OCEANOGRAPHIC SURVEY SHIP USNS MAURY AFTER MARIE THARP

From Secretary of the Navy Public Affairs

Recently, on International Women’s Day, Secretary of the Navy (SECNAV) Carlos Del Toro announced that the Pathfinder-class oceanographic survey ship formerly named USNS Maury (T-AGS 66) has been renamed USNS Marie Tharp (T-AGS 66).

This renaming honors Marie Tharp, a pioneering geologist and oceanographic cartographer who created the first scientific maps of the Atlantic Ocean floor and shaped our understanding of plate tectonics and continental drift.

The decision arrived after a congressionally mandated Naming Commission outlined several military assets across all branches of service that required renaming due to confederate ties. In September 2022, Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin accepted all recommendations from the naming commission and gave each service until the end of 2023 to rename their assets.

“I’m pleased to announce the former USNS Maury will be renamed in honor of pioneering geologist and oceanographic cartographer, Marie Tharp. Her dedication to research brought life to the unknown ocean world and proved important information about the earth, all while being a woman in a male-dominated industry,” said Del Toro. “As the history of our great Nation evokes, we must put forth the effort to recognize figures who positively influenced our society. This renaming honors just one of the many historic women who have made a significant impact on not only our Navy, but our Nation.”

Tharp was born in 1920 and graduated from the Ohio University in 1943. Due to WWII, more women were recruited into a variety of professions, prompting the University of Michigan to create the Lamont Geological Observatory. During this time she met Bruce C. Heezen (namesake of T-AGS 64) and worked together using photographic data to locate drowned military aircraft from WWII. Between 1946 and 1952, Woods Hole Oceanographic Institute’s research vessel, Atlantis, used sonar to obtain depth measurements of the North Atlantic Ocean, which Tharp, in collaboration with her colleague, Heezen, used to create detailed seafloor profiles and maps. While examining these profiles, Tharp noticed a rift in the ocean floor that she deduced to be a rift valley that ran along the ridge crest and continued along the length of its axis, evidence of continental drift. At the time, the consensus of the U.S. scientific community held continental drift to be impossible, but later examination bore out Tharp’s hypothesis. Her work thus proved instrumental to the development of Plate Tectonic Theory, a revolutionary idea in the field of geology at the time. Owing to this and other innovative mapping efforts some of which the Navy funded, the National Geographic Society awarded Tharp its highest honor, the Hubbard Medal, placing her among the ranks of other pioneering researchers and explorers such as Sir Ernest Shackleton, Charles Lindbergh, and Rear Admiral Richard E. Byrd.

The logistical aspects associated with renaming the ship will begin henceforth and will continue until completion with minimal impact on operations and the crew. T-AGS 66 was accepted in 2016 and named USNS Maury (T-AGS 66) after Cmdr. Matthew Fontaine Maury, the “Father of Modern Oceanography” who resigned from his Navy career to accept a command in the Confederate States Navy. The former USNS Maury was the only U.S. Navy Vessel named after a Confederate military officer.

The service will continue until completion with minimal impact on operations and the crew. The ESB ship class has a flight deck with four aviation operating spots capable of interfacing with roll-on/roll-off discharge facilities and on/off-loading vehicles support day and night aircraft launch and recovery operations. The ships are capable of supporting MH-53E helicopters; accommodations; workspaces; and ordnance storage for embarked forces, enhanced command, control and communications.

NAVY ACCEPTS DELIVERY OF USNS JOHN L. CANLEY

From Team Ships Public Affairs

The U.S. Navy accepted delivery of the expeditionary sea base USNS John L. Canley (ESB 6), March 1.

ESB-class ships are highly flexible platforms that support various military operations such as Airborne Mine Counter Measures (AMCM), Special Operations Force (SOF) operations, Crisis Response Sea-basing (e.g., Special Purpose Marine Air Ground Task Force), Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance (ISR) and Unmanned Aviation Systems (UAS) operations. The ships are part of the critical access infrastructure that supports the deployment of forces.

“Today’s delivery highlights the strengths of the Navy and our industry partners, working together to bring ESB 6 and its range of capabilities to the fleet,” said Tim Roberts, Strategic and Theater Sealift Program Manager, Program Executive Office, Ships. “Sergeant Major Canley nobly served his country, and his namesake ship will help provide the warfighter with capability and access.”

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NAVY ACCEPTS DELIVERY OF USNS APALACHICOLA

From Team Ships Public Affairs

The U.S. Navy accepted delivery of expeditionary fast transport vessel, USNS Apalachicola (T-EPF 13), Feb. 16.

EPFs are designed to operate in shallow waterways and are capable of a wide range of activities. These versatile, non-combatant transport ships are used for the high-speed transportation of troops, military vehicles, and equipment. Their missions include:

• Overseas contingency operations
• Humanitarian assistance
• Disaster relief
• Support of special operations forces
• Theater security cooperation activities
• Emerging joint sea-basing concepts

Expeditionary fast transport ships can transport 600 short tons as far as 1,200 nautical miles at an average speed of 35 knots. Each vessel includes a flight deck to support day and night aircraft launch and recovery operations. The ships are capable of interfacing with roll-on/roll-off discharge facilities and on/off-loading vehicles such as a fully combat-loaded Abrams Main Battle Tank.

“The delivery of T-EPF 13 comes after several successful at-sea periods for the vessel, including Unmanned Logistig Prototype Trials to assess autonomous capabilities integrated into the shipboard control system,” said Tim Roberts, Strategic and Theater Sealift Program Manager, Program Executive Office (PEO), Ships. “The Navy and our shipbuilding partner, Austal USA, are proud of the work accomplished and look forward to T-EPF 13 providing capability and capacity to Military Sealift Command, the fleet, and the U.S. Marine Corps.”

Austal USA is under contract to build the future USNS Cody (T-EPF 14).

MSC IS NOW HIRING

THE RIGHT TIME TO GET HIRED IS TODAY. BONUSES AVAILABLE.

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**HERSHEL “WOODY” WILLIAMS DELIVERS SUPPLIES TO TÜRKIYE**

By Petty Officer 2nd Class Conner Blake, U.S. Naval Forces Europe and Africa Public Affairs

The expeditionary sea base USS Hershel “Woody” Williams (ESB 4) arrived in Mersin, Türkiye, to deliver relief supplies to Turkish authorities for those affected by the earthquakes, Feb. 28. At the request of the Turkish government, the Hershel “Woody” Williams arrived to deliver relief supplies to Türkiye on Feb. 6, U.S. military forces assigned to U.S. European Command are providing humanitarian assistance and disaster relief in support of U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), the Bureau of Humanitarian Assistance (BHA), and the international community to Turkish people during this tragedy.

Hershel “Woody” Williams is forward-deployed to the U.S. Naval Forces Africa (NAVAFRICA) area of operations, while employed by U.S. 6th Fleet. The ship is capable of conducting humanitarian and disaster relief operations, as well as supporting a variety of rotary wing aircraft. Hershel “Woody” Williams’ unique capabilities are part of the critical access infrastructure that supports the deployment of forces and supplies to support global missions.

Task Force 63 is headquartered at Naples, Italy. Composed of oilers, provision ships, and repair ships, its mission is the delivery of supplies at sea, and effecting repairs to other ships.

**U.S. NAVY CHRISTENS USNS CODY**

From the Office of the U.S. Navy’s Chief of Information

The future USNS Cody will join the fleet as one of nearly 100 U.S. Navy ships operating globally each day ensuring freedom of the seas, protecting international law, and strengthening relationships with Allies and partners.

The future USNS Cody will be the first Flight II configuration Spearhead-class expeditionary fast transport (EPF). The ship is named in honor of Cody, Wyoming, and is the first ship in naval service named after the city.

EPFs, formerly designated as Joint High Speed Vessels, are all-aluminum catamarans that provide high-speed, shallow-draft transportation capability to support the intra-theater maneuver of personnel, supplies, and equipment for the Navy, Marine Corps, and Army. EPFs enable the rapid projection, agile maneuver, and sustainment of forces in response to a wide range of military and civilian contingencies such as Non-Combatant Evacuation Operations (NEO), Humanitarian Assistance, and Disaster Relief (HADR).

The Flight II ships will enhance the medical mission capability of the EPF’s mission portfolio. With an embarked medical unit, the Flight II EPF will have two operating rooms, the ability to support approximately 41 medical patients, and 147 embarked forces. Flight II EPFs will have an 11M RIB and MV-22 capability.
Military Sealift Command (MSC) is preparing to launch, in the next couple of months, a new referral bonus program that will give employees the opportunity to earn money when they recruit future civil service mariners (CIVMARs).

The MSC Referral Bonus Program offers bonuses from $50 to $500 to employees who recruit a candidate who goes on to fill a critical afloat rating at MSC. Employees whose duties do not include recruitment or selection of CIVMARs will be eligible. The program will exclude MSC military members and the referral of family members.

“Referral programs, as part of an overall recruiting strategy, have the added benefit that current employees are familiar with the demands, culture and requirements of the job and also the individual whom they are referring,” said MSC Director, Civilian Human Resources Policy/Total Force Management (N11C) Laurie Porter. “Referral programs often result in not only increased success in recruitment, but also in better longevity of the new hires - i.e., reduced attrition - compared to other recruiting efforts, due to the aforementioned aspects.”

If an employee refers a potential CIVMAR who applies to MSC, all that prospective hire has to do is put down the employee’s name as a reference during the application process. If the hire goes on to qualify and gets a fleet assignment, then the employee receives a bonus.

“The benefits are threefold,” said Porter. “The referring employee receives a financial bonus up to $500, the new employee gains federal employment with promising opportunities out there in the maritime industry with expected growth during the years ahead.”

Pelowski says, “MSC employees have a lot to offer when it comes to helping the command combat the challenges of meeting manning requirements.” The hope is this program will positively impact MSC’s overall mission readiness as we work to add new CIVMARs to our workforce.

“We’ve had some challenges with recruiting and retaining qualified CIVMARs for a number of critical ratings and that has an effect on operational capability and the overall morale of the workforce. We are asking and giving our employees the chance to help us change that and recognize them for their efforts.”

Perhaps the best thing about the Referral Bonus Program is there is no special set of skills required. For those looking to take advantage of this program, it’s as simple as talking about what it means to be a member of MSC.

“Everyone can be a recruiter at MSC. This is an opportunity for our employees to tell people how great it is to work for MSC and share their personal experience,” said Pelowski. “I do it everywhere I go. I listen to them talk about what they want to do or dislike in their current job and then I tell them about MSC. I talk about the adventure, the benefits, training and promotion opportunities and how you can serve the nation as a federal civil service mariner. What’s better than recruiting your future co-workers?”

The Referral Bonus Program is expected to be implemented this summer.

MSC TO LAUNCH REFERRAL BONUS PROGRAM

By Hendrick Dickson, Military Sealift Command Public Affairs

U.S. Marines JOIN REPUBLIC OF KOREA MARINE CORPS ALLIES FOR EXERCISE FREEDOM SHIELD 23

By Capt. Joshua Hays, III Marine Expeditionary Force

U.S. Marines deployed from Japan and the United States ahead of large-scale combined exercise with their Republic of Korea Marine Corps counterparts, March 12.
MSC ASSISTS WITH RETURN OF ARMY EQUIPMENT

By Christina Johnson, Military Sealift Command Europe and Africa Public Affairs

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U.S. Navy's Military Sealift Command Europe and Africa worked closely with representatives of the U.S. Army's 838th Transportation Battalion to move 3rd Armored Brigade Combat Team, 1st Cavalry Division (3-1 CD ABCT) equipment from Poland to Texas.

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U.S. Navy’s Military Sealift Command Europe and Africa worked closely with representatives of the U.S. Army’s 838th Transportation Battalion to move 3rd Armored Brigade Combat Team, 1st Cavalry Division (3-1 CD ABCT) equipment from Poland to Texas.

The approximately 1,600 pieces of Army gear needed to be cleaned and inspected prior to loading on the American Roll-On Roll-Off Carrier (ARC) Endurance, a ship on-hire to Military Sealift Command with the capability to provide transport of heavy vehicles. Earlier this year, 3-1 CD ABCT personnel flew back to Fort Hood, Texas, and their gear was transferred to a container area at the Port of Gdynia, Poland, awaiting sea transport. After a few weather delays, Endeavor was able to pull into the pier to begin loading the equipment, Feb. 26.

USS MOUNT WHITNEY COMPLETES SCHEDULED REPAIR PERIOD

By Christina Johnson, Military Sealift Command Europe and Africa Public Affairs

USS Mount Whitney (LCC 20), U.S. 6th Fleet flagship, completed a Regular Overhaul (ROH) period that included dry docking in the port of Genoa, Italy, Feb. 22.

The maintenance and repairs, part of the shipboard maintenance cycle, began in August 2022 and were completed by Military Sealift Command Civil Service Mariners, U.S. contractors and local shipyard workers.

Nearly $20.5 million was spent on major maintenance items such as inspection of the propulsion, stern rudder and shafts and rudder, emergency diesel generator overhaul; and boiler repairs.

Additionally, funds were used to install the most up to date computer and communications systems, Consolidated Afloat Networks and Enterprise Services for USS Mount Whitney’s mission as the U.S. 6th Fleet flagship.

“We are very pleased with the repair and renovation of the ship during the ROH,” said Bryan Eubanks, Military Sealift Command Europe and Africa (MSC EURAFL) Maintenance Hub supervisory port engineer. “This maintenance phase allowed us to update the ship and keep it combat ready for extended periods of time.”

Prior to the ROH, Mount Whitney was instrumental in the support of key exercises and operations in the U.S. Naval Forces Europe and U.S. 5th Fleet areas of operation. “The ship was very busy prior to entering this scheduled maintenance period,” said Capt. Daniel Prochazka, Mount Whitney’s commanding officer. “An ROH is scheduled twice every five years, and ensures the safety and mission readiness of the ship to fulfill its continuing mission in supporting U.S. 6th Fleet and our NATO alliance.”

Mount Whitney, forward deployed to Gaeta, Italy, operates with a combined crew of U.S. Sailors and Military Sealift Command Civil Service Mariners in the U.S. Sixth Fleet area of operations in support of U.S. national security interests in Europe and Africa.

The Civil Service Mariners aboard Mount Whitney perform navigation, deck engineering and supply service operations, while military personnel support communications, weapons systems and security initiatives.

U.S. 6th Fleet, headquartered in Naples, Italy, conducts the full spectrum of joint and naval operations, often in concert with allied and interagency partners, in order to advance U.S. national interests, and promote security and stability in Europe and Africa.

USS LEWIS B. PULLER SHIPS SUPPORTS UAE PILOT TRAINING IN ARABIAN GULF

From U.S. Naval Forces Central Command Public Affairs

A U.S. Navy ship served as a training platform for helicopter pilots from the United Arab Emirates Armed Forces, Feb. 22-24.

Emirati pilots conducted deck landing qualifications aboard U.S. Navy expeditionary sea base USS Lewis B. Puller (ESB 3) as the ship operated in the Arabian Gulf, enhancing interoperability among regional maritime partners.

“The pilots and aircrew integrated seamlessly with the deck crew of Lewis B. Puller,” said Capt. Jon Bradford, commanding officer of Lewis B. Puller. “It was a great experience for my team and we look forward to working with our Emirati partners in the future.”

The deck landing qualifications helped 25 Emirati military pilots maintain proficiency in landing on the flight deck of a ship at sea.

During the three-day training opportunity, UH-60M Black Hawk, Bell 407, AS332 Super Puma, and AH-64D Apache helicopters conducted 158 landings. Lewis B. Puller is forward-deployed to U.S. 5th Fleet and is capable of supporting a wide variety of missions including counter-piracy, maritime security, disaster relief and crisis response operations.
I recently had the opportunity to meet with Military Sealift Command Bosun Andre Sutton, Damage Controlman and Instructor at MSC’s Training Center East on Fort Eustis, Virginia. We met at the Fort Eustis Aquatic Center, where newly hired Civil Service Mariners (CIVMAR) and fleet return CIVMARs receive waterborne survival training and Surface Rescue Swimmer Candidates receive training and evaluation. Here are some of the highlights of our conversation.

What are some of your roles and responsibilities both as a Damage Controlman and instructor?

Sutton-As a Damage Controlman and instructor, my job is to train MSC’s junior mariners on small arms, underway replenishment-at-sea (UNREP) and I teach life-saving-at-sea techniques. I also work with Surface Rescue Swimmer candidates to ensure they are sufficiently conditioned to fill that role.

The MSC Surface Rescue Swimmer Program consists of a cadre of MSC CIVMARs who are trained to evaluate the condition of survivors in the water and provide immediate assistance to ensure their successful at-sea recovery.

How long have you served with MSC?

Sutton- I have been with MSC since 2002; just short of 22 years.

Prior to becoming an MSC instructor, what were some of your previous duty stations?

Sutton-I have sailed on MSC ships for 20 years as a Bosun. I have been on so many MSC ships both as a Ship’s Bosun and an UNREP Bosun. I honestly don’t know how many ships I have been on. It would probably be easier for me to name the ships I have not been on. I have sailed on approximately 20 MSC ships.

What were you doing prior to joining MSC?

Sutton- Prior to joining MSC, I was active duty in the U.S. Navy. I joined the Navy as a Radioman. Radioman was not a good fit for me so I went to Deck Department as an undesignated Sailor. Once I got to Deck Department, I fell in love with the community and became a Boatswain Mate. I did 12 years in the Navy and decided to leave active duty service and join MSC.

What made you decide to join MSC after your time in the Navy?

Sutton- Money (chuckling). I found that I got paid a bit more money sailing with MSC while doing the exact same things I was doing at work as I was when I was in the Navy. My wife was pregnant with triplets and we needed to bring in a bit more money.

I understand there is some exciting news for the Sutton family in regards to the Navy?

Sutton- I have 20 year-old triplets and a 28 year-old daughter. My triplets just joined the Navy and they are the first set of Black triplets to join the Navy. They are the first set of triplets to join the same branch of the military at the same time. My 28-year-old daughter is getting ready to graduate from Navy Boot Camp. My wife is prior Navy and we are very proud that they decided to follow our path to join the military and serve their country.

I also understand that you have some exciting news yourself in regards to the Navy?

Sutton- I decided to go back into the U.S. Navy Reserves, so as to not only be a father to my children to also be a shipmate and serve right alongside them. So we inspired our children to join the Navy and in-turn, they inspired me to go back into the Navy.

Do you have any advice for CIVMARs who are striving to succeed as part of the MSC team?

Sutton- My advice applies to not only CIVMARs but to service members and civilian support staff as well; pay attention to detail. If you pay attention to detail, things will run smooth for you. Also, don’t become stagnant. Some of our folks can become comfortable and become stagnant. Don’t be left behind by settling for the “easy.” Strive to keep moving up and look for ways to take on more responsibility.

Is there anything you would like to add?

Sutton- The Navy saved my life. I was headed down the wrong path, as many urban kids are. I decided to join the military to get out of that environment and I have been doing well ever since. After the Navy my family enjoys a life of abundance with MSC. Now I get to serve in the Navy, with my children and with MSC; and you can’t ask for anything better than that.

USNS TRENTON ASSISTS VENICE ORGANIZATION

By Christina Johnson, Military Sealift Command Europe and Africa Public Affairs

USNS Trenton (T-EPF 5), Military Sealift Command’s expeditionary fast transport ship, participated in a community relations project while the ship was in port Venice, Italy, March 7.

Members of the military detachment aboard USNS Trenton (T-EPF 5), Military Sealift Command’s expeditionary fast transport ship, participated in a community relations project while the ship was in port Venice, Italy, March 7.

By Bill Mesta, Military Sealift Command Public Affairs

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Civilian teammates and service members assigned to Military Sealift Command gathered to celebrate and honor the contributions of women across the Nation by hosting a virtual special observance for Women's History Month, March 30.

Each March, the Department of Defense pays tribute to the women who, through their determination and contributions, have shaped America's history and whose efforts continue to pave the way forward.

“In 1980, President Jimmy Carter issued the first presidential proclamation declaring the week of March 8 as National Women’s History Week,” said MSC teammate Monica Henain, the Mistress of Ceremonies for the special observance. “The U.S. Congress followed suit the next year, passing a resolution establishing a national celebration.”

“Six years later, the National Women’s History Project successfully petitioned Congress to expand the event to the entire month of March,” Henain added. “Throughout history, women have broken barriers, through legitimate channels and otherwise, to serve in the military and defend our nation. However, women were not integrated into the military until 1948, when President Harry Truman signed the Women’s Armed Services Integration Act.”

The keynote speaker for MSC’s special observance was Shirley Jones Esquire, a member of the Senior Executive Service (SES) at the U.S. Government Accountability Office. As the first African American female in the agency's history to be appointed to the position of Managing Associate General Counsel, within GAO's Office of General Counsel she has management and leadership responsibility for three of the office’s legal teams focused on budget and appropriations law and congressional oversight.

“So why do we celebrate Women’s History Month? Or the better question is why is Women’s History Month important?” Jones queried. “Women have always made important contributions to our history; both in U.S. and abroad. But early textbooks almost totally excluded women from their pages.”

“By all accounts, unless the textbooks were referring to powerful Queens like Queen Cleopatra or legendary figures associated with slavery like Harriet Tubman, women were essentially left out of history,” according to Jones. “Thankfully this changed with the birth of Women’s History as an academic discipline and also a celebration led by the National Women’s History Project, now known as the National Women’s History Alliance, whose mission is to rewrite women back into history.”

Within the national organization of Blacks in Government (BIG), Ms. Jones assumed the position of BIG National President on Jan. 1, 2021. In her advocacy role, Ms. Jones has twice had the opportunity to testify before Congress on the lack of diversity in the government’s SES community and the impact of pay for performance on employee morale.

Part of Jones’ presentation included some of the recent accomplishments of Women.

“We women are paving the way as we now have women widely represented in all aspects of life,” according to Jones. “We have women mayors all over the country, like Mayor Lori Lightfoot in Chicago, Mayor London Breed in San Francisco and Mayor Amy Shuler Goodwin, the first female mayor of Charleston, West Virginia.”

“We have female governors. As a matter of fact, this is a record year as there are a record number of 12 women who are leading states,” Jones said. “(These include the governor) in my home state of Alabama, Kay Ivey, Gretchen Whitmer in Michigan, and Tina Kotek of Oregon.”

“We also have women heading some of our major Federal agencies,” Jones continued. “We have Karen stopwatch who is the Director of the United States Office of Personnel Management. We have United States Secretary of Housing and Urban Development Marcia Fudge, and the United States Secretary of the Treasury Janet Yellen.”

“And of course we have our first female Vice President of the United States, Kamala Harris,” Jones concluded.

Military Sealift Command continues to foster an inclusive and diverse workplace where all of its teammates are empowered and encouraged to reach their full professional potential.

Alcohol Awareness Month is a health awareness campaign dedicated to raising awareness around alcohol use and understanding the causes and treatment available for one of the nation’s most significant health issues. The campaign also aims to reduce the social stigma associated with alcoholism and educate people on how the disease can be addressed.

Alcohol addiction and abuse claims thousands of lives across the country every year. Here are some notable statistics on alcohol use and addiction:

• More than 65 million Americans report binge drinking or heavy drinking in one month, which is more than 40% of those who drink alcohol.
• In 2018, there were 10,511 alcohol-impaired driving fatalities, totaling 29% of all traffic fatalities for the year.
• Teen alcohol use kills 4,700 people each year, more than all illegal drugs combined.

By making people more aware of the situation and the viable solutions, Alcohol Awareness Month aims to reduce the pain and suffering alcohol abuse causes to people’s lives.

In addition, many people don’t always know how much alcohol they are drinking or whether their drinking could impact their health. If this resonates with you, you can visit https://auditscreen.org and take a self-assessment to see if the amount you drink could be putting you at serious health risk. You can talk to your health care provider and/or check out http://donecaep.fhlt.psc.gov for a wide range of free services. Know that all DONCEAP services, to include free mental health counseling, are completely confidential.

And know that you have support!

Contact your Health Promotion Program Manager at MSC_HPP@us.navy.mil or Leighanne.gerstbrein.ctr@us.navy.mil

For more information you can also check out https://www.niaaa.nih.gov/alcohols-effects-health

Follow Military Sealift Command on Facebook, Twitter, LinkIn and Instagram
For Hawkins and his crew this was no different from that of their predecessors. What was of special note was the realization of how isolated they were at the bottom of the world.

“The ODF missions differ from most in that you travel to a part of the world where outside support is minimal or non-existent depending on what may be needed. That raises the stakes on any potential problem that may be encountered, because the resources to address them are only what you have on hand and the abilities of those on site,” he explained. “While this is often the issue whenever a vessel is at sea, it is never more true than when you are in Antarctica. McMurdo Station lives every day this way as well; hence we are impressed, and can appreciate, their self-reliant culture.”

It is not just the physical distance of being in Antarctica that makes people feel isolated from the rest of the world, it is the lack of communication through technology. Something as simple as sending an email, which most of us do several times a day, can suddenly become something incredibly challenging from a ship at McMurdo Station. In addition, without the Internet, it becomes difficult to get news and to keep up with what is going on in the rest of the world.

“One of the difficult things for a crew these days is the lack of access to information and connection to the Internet for their everyday communications,” said Hawkins. “We as a culture have become hugely reliant on it, and even vessels at sea these days usually have some level of Internet availability. Crews on ODF missions must adjust to the way they conduct their personal business and communications. We discuss this up front prior to the voyage to minimize the impact, but you really don’t understand what this means, until you experience it.”

Despite the challenges of the mission, Hawkins recognizes the positive aspects of the ODF mission, noting that crew-members who make the trip take away a new sense of accomplishment and pride. “I think every crew member that participates in ODF appreciates how rare an opportunity they get to experience,” he said. “They will see and do things that most of the world will only hear about, or see the pictures. Believe me, you hear it said so often that a picture just doesn’t do it justice.”

For Hawkins, the mission to Antarctica has a more special meaning for him. He sees the mission as a way to experience a piece of the world that is relatively untouched; a place that remains the same year after year. Something in which he finds comfort. “While you are in Antarctica, you think every day how much you’d love to share what you are experiencing with those who you know and care for. Another part of you feels a bit selfish in wishing that this part of the world remained exactly as it is, hidden away, without the influx of people and what we tend to bring,” Hawkins explained. “Even in this most remote of regions, we see the influence of what we (the rest of us in this world) are doing, and often not in a good way. So, while I feel honored to have had this experience, I sort of want to close the door quietly behind me and slip away unnoticed.”

Ocean Giant will return to Port Hueneme, California, where its mission began in late December, to offload its cargo and prepare for future support missions. The ship will be followed by MV Ocean Gladiator from McMurdo Station.

Operation Deep Freeze is a joint service, on-going Defense Support to Civilian Authorities activity in support of the National Science Foundation (NSF), lead agency for the United States Antarctic Program.