



ICE MAIL

Postal specialists deliver mail, supplies on the rocks



Rain, hail, sleet, or snow—the mail must go. Though many have heard the saying before, the thought especially rings true when it comes to delivering mail to the continent of Antarctica. McMurdo Air Station is the Antarctic base of operations for scientists performing research in a variety of fields. Delivering their mail is the job of postal workers from Pacific Air Forces Detachment 4. These postal specialists support McMurdo Station from

October to February each year.

To insiders, Antarctica is affectionately known as “The Ice,” where approximately 2,500 contractors, National Science Foundation employees, Air National Guard personnel and two Coast Guard ships are assigned. At this very remote station, mail service for mission support and quality of life is extremely important.

Only 260 people stay at McMurdo Station during the winter months of March through September. These caretakers and maintainers are literally cut off from the outside world due to the severe weather conditions. Flights to “The Ice” are suspended during this time, and all mail is held at the Christchurch Post Office.

When the ice begins to thaw, postal workers begin to prepare the mail for delivery. The first week of October is when the summer season officially starts and the mail business jumps into high gear.

The Christchurch Post Office processes an average of 235,000 pounds of mail with 75 percent of that amount destined for McMurdo Station. The other 25 percent is for sup-

port staff stationed at Christchurch.

“As summer approaches, the mail handlers begin preparations to put postal services back in motion,” said Christchurch Postmaster, Tech. Sgt. Al Coe. “Before any mail can be flown to ‘The Ice,’ the postal team ensures each item is X-rayed, inspected and screened by bomb and drug dogs to ensure safety.”

The influx of workers heading back to “The Ice” eagerly use their free mailing privileges to send needed items down for the coming months.

February marks the end of the summer season on “The Ice.” Outbound mail from McMurdo begins to heavily increase as personnel begin to depart. Seven days prior to officially closing McMurdo Station for the winter, Sergeant Coe closes down the mailroom on “The Ice.” Along with contract workers, he cleans, stores supplies, and secures the facility to officially mothball the postal operation.

When Sergeant Coe takes his seat with 100 or so other passengers aboard the C-141 flying back to Christchurch, he is satisfied that he and his team made an impact on this mission’s success. (Submitted by PACAF/SC)