



## Eagle to Australia (Australian Bicentenary)

USCGC Eagle (WIX-327) spent the 1987 - 1988 academic year sailing to Australia and back to help celebrate the Australian Bicentenary. The bicentenary marked 200 years since the British First Fleet arrived in Sydney in 1788. The main event for Eagle was the First Fleet Reenactment Voyage held on Australia Day, January 26, 1988. Members of the Class of 1980 played key roles in both phases of the Eagle's cruise.

### Semester afloat

To supplement the Eagle's permanent crew, the ship embarked additional officers, first class cadets (class of 1988) and third class cadets (class of 1990). In order to stay on track academically, the Academy cadets needed to take semester afloat courses while aboard Eagle. The first class cadets studied meteorology while the third class cadets studied organizational behavior. LT [Bill Zack](#) was one of the organizational behavior instructors on the first phase along with CAPT Earl Potter. CAPT Potter also served as the dean afloat. In addition to classroom sessions and reading assignments, the OB students kept a journal that related their daily activities aboard Eagle to the theories being studied in class.

### First phase

The trip to Australia started with a festive departure from the Eagle's dock on the Academy waterfront. The itinerary was as follows:

New London, CT → West Palm Beach, Florida → Rodman, Panama → Guayaquil, Ecuador → Galapagos Islands, Ecuador → Papeete, Tahiti → Bora Bora, Tahiti → Pago Pago, American Samoa → Apia, Western Samoa → Nuku'alofa, Tonga → Lord Howe Island, New South Wales, Australia → Newcastle, New South Wales, Australia → Sydney, New South Wales, Australia



In addition to [Bill Zack](#), Class of 1980 graduates on the first phase were LT Steve How and LT [Kathy Hamblett](#). How was the ship's supply officer for both phases of the trip. He was responsible for the huge amount of cash that the ship needed to purchase supplies, mainly fuel and groceries, throughout the voyage. Hamblett stood watches and was involved in the professional studies aspect of the cadet training.

How - far left. Hamblett - 4th from left. Zack - 8th from left.

In West Palm Beach, the officers and crew were hosted by the Coast Guard Foundation. A reception was held at The Breakers Palm Beach, a famous luxury hotel. The event resembled the caddy day scene from the movie Caddyshack as the cadets took over the pool and other posh portions of the property. Due to inclement weather, the food from the cookout was moved inside to one of the grand ballrooms. Beans and weenies served on fine china with silverware and linen napkins was quite a sight.

Eagle transited the Panama Canal during daylight hours with light rain falling. She was dwarfed in the locks by the container ships that were going through at the same time. A short stay in Rodman allowed for some liberty to enjoy ceviche and other local delicacies. Then it was on to Guayaquil and the hospitality of the local and national officials. That hospitality included a high-level reception for members of the wardroom, the Coast Guard admiral who was the liaison for Central and South America, and the head of the Ecuadorian navy and members of his staff. Normally, a visit to the Galapagos Islands



requires years of planning and permitting. Although nothing had been set up in advance, Eagle CO CAPT Ernst Cummings wanted the Eagle to be allowed to anchor off one of the islands and to have the opportunity for a day of liberty by ferrying people ashore with the ship's small boats. Utilizing his fluency in Spanish and power of persuasion, LT Zack managed to convince the Ecuadorian Admiral to waive the normal procedures and to approve the visit on the spot.

Word traveled fast - when the first liberty party landed, there was already a sign outside the local bar welcoming the Eagle to the Galapagos. The visitors had the opportunity to tour the Charles Darwin Research Station. The tour included seeing Galapagos tortoises, lizards, and Darwin's finches, which were key in Darwin's formulation of the theory of evolution and natural selection.



The next stage of the trip was the longest stretch between port calls: a twenty-eight day transit to Tahiti. The Eagle took advantage of the trade winds and calm seas to operate under sail power only for most of the distance. All electronic navigation was shut down for a time by design as the cadets and crew relied on celestial navigation and dead reckoning to plot their course. Fresh food and produce became scarce as the ship headed further west. Boredom did start to creep in, relieved in part by nightly movies and activities such as egg drop contests from the yardarms.



The highlight of the long transit was the ceremony marking the crossing of the equator. Those who were already Shellbacks initiated the Pollywogs into the Order of Neptune. While the specifics of the ceremony are meant to be kept secret from



the uninitiated, one ritual involved Vegemite and King Neptune's toes. Enough said! The ceremony marking the crossing of the international dateline was sedate by comparison as first-timers joined the Domain of the Golden Dragon.

In Tahiti the highlights included discounts on rooms at the famous Tahara'a InterContinental Hotel, black sand beaches, and tropical drinks. The short hop to Bora Bora enabled a visit to another classic Polynesian establishment, Bloody Mary's restaurant. Members of the wardroom chipped in for a day on a chartered catamaran owned by British expat Richard and crewed by his son Vaitapu. While cruising around the lagoon, the officers got to listen in when Jimmy Buffet, a frequent client, called in to chat with Richard. Suitably inspired, the next meal was indeed a cheeseburger in paradise.

The goodwill tour through the South Pacific stopped next in American Samoa. The Eagle was greeted by locals in traditional outrigger canoes who offered welcoming gifts of fruit and flowers. A rather unwise decision was



made to take on a group of Samoans in a game of football. Although significantly outsized, the Eagle athletes put up a valiant effort. One of the hosts was Stan Mataele, who played briefly with the Green Bay Packers and was listed at 6' 2" and 278 pounds. Postgame refreshments included cans of Budweiser that had a hint of formaldehyde flavor. The island hopping moved on to Western Samoa and Tonga. At every port call the Eagle was greeted with great enthusiasm and visiting hours proved to be quite popular.

While on liberty, everyone got to explore and learn a lot about the local culture and customs. Food played a large part of the island experience, including such staples as breadfruit, taro, bananas, coconuts, yams, and a huge variety of fish. Many souvenirs were purchased, such as colorful lavalavas, small wood-carved outrigger canoes, and scrimshaw. While some were tempted to stay in the islands like the Bounty survivors who settled on Pitcairn Island, Australia beckoned and Eagle continued her journey to the land down under.



After nearly four months at sea, Eagle needed a good cleaning to be presentable for her official duties in Australia. The ship anchored off Lord Howe Island, just over 400 miles from the mainland, so a field day could be held. Then Eagle weighed anchor and headed for Newcastle, New South Wales, the first official port of call in Australia that also marked the end of the academic semester. The crew displayed their homesickness when the ship passed the golden arches of a McDonald's on the way to her berth and a loud cheer arose. Eagle remained in Newcastle over the Christmas holiday before transiting to Sydney. The welcoming party on the water and on shore was impressive, as was passing by the iconic Sydney opera house. Between liberty in Newcastle and Sydney, the last dose of sightseeing and souvenir purchases ran the gamut from koala



sanctuaries to kangaroos and even learning the words to Waltzing Matilda. The phase one officers and cadets swapped places with their phase two counterparts and took a military flight back



to the United States. A change of planes in Hawaii was part of the homeward bound logistics, and the cadets volunteered for baggage handling duty on the tarmac to keep the process speedy. Everyone arrived back in Connecticut with enough time to celebrate the new year back where the entire adventure had begun.