

Thomas Orde-Lees

Born 1877. Antarctic explorer and parachutist.
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1. Introduction



Thomas Orde-Lees on the deck of the Endurance.

This chapter was archived in 2021, with acknowledgement and thanks, from the www.coolantarctica.com website.

A complex and rather eccentric character, Orde-Lees (also referred to as "Lees" in various publications about the expedition) was a captain in the Royal Marines at the time of joining the Endurance. He was responsible for the motor-sledges including some of his own design, that it was hoped would have helped carry Shackleton and his team across the continent.

Orde-Lees fulfilled the role of a Royal Navy man whom Shackleton thought it wise to take along with the expedition to gain political and military support he felt was needed. It was only after approaching Winston Churchill that permission was gained for Orde-Lees to be released from his Navy Duty, bearing in mind that the expedition was leaving England on the eve of the First World War. He was a skier at a time when this was very rare and a physical fitness expert.

A former public school boy, Orde-Lees was generally disliked by the other expeditioners, though was an effective and thorough store-keeper. He had a rather surly manner and was fundamentally somewhat lazy, with no

inclination to hide the fact, simply avoiding pulling his weight if he was able to do so. In such close conditions with other men, he was frequently ridiculed. The men would take delight in antagonizing him if possible, when Shackleton insisted on extra rations for instance and so over-rode storekeeper Orde-Lees' meagre distribution of foodstuffs.

He had taken a bicycle with him on the Endurance and would often go out onto the pack ice and ride it performing "tricks" around the randomly chaotic hummocks. On one of these occasions near to midwinter, he became lost and had to be rescued by a search party, he was ordered not to leave the ship alone again.

While in the lifeboat, the Dudley Docker, on the journey to Elephant Island, a gale blew up, Orde-Lees was malingering and not taking as much of a turn at the rowing with the other men when Worsley, who was in charge of the boat ordered - yelled - at him to join in as their survival may have depended on it. Despite this and the fact that the rest of the men in the boat joined in behind Worsley to get Orde-lees to row, he still refused and crept onto the sleeping bags to rest (admittedly, he was in a poor physical state due to the privations of the journey, though no more so than many others and far less so than some who nonetheless pulled their weight). He very rapidly began to bail the boat out though as it began to be swamped and disaster became an immediate possibility.

Thomas Orde-Lees was born at Aix-la-Chapelle (Aachen) in Germany or Prussia, as it was then called during a holiday his parents were taking. His father also called Thomas, was known as something of an eccentric character, he was a Barrister at Law (though not in practice) and Chief Constable of Northampton. Life was comfortable and the family had a Butler, Cook, Nurse and Housemaid.

The young Orde-Lees was given an education at Marlborough College, The Royal Naval School (Gosport) and later at Sandhurst Military Academy, he gained a commission in the Royal Marines becoming a Lieutenant Colonel. He was posted to China at the time of the infamous "Boxer Rebellion".

In 1910 Orde-Lees applied to join Scott's Terra Nova expedition, but was turned down.

On return to England after the expedition, he served in the Balloon Service and saw action on the Western front. With Shackleton's help, he joined the Royal Flying Corps (R.F.C.) and was a pioneering figure in parachute jumping.

On one occasion, he jumped off the top of Tower Bridge into the River Thames, only about 160 or so feet below to convince the British Military of the usefulness of the parachute. Although this was just a stunt, it seemed to

do the trick and the R.F.C. formed a parachute division with Orde-Lees in command.



Still from a Pathé newsreel of Orde-Lees undertaking low parachute jump (of 160 feet) from the top of Tower Bridge, London. He has just landed in the water, and his parachute can be seen in the lower right of the photo.

As a result of his parachuting, Orde-Lees went to Japan as a member of the British Naval Air Mission where he taught the techniques to the Japanese Air Force. Staying in Japan, he obtained a job as Tokyo correspondent with the London Times Newspaper a post he held for 3 years. This led to an appointment as an assistant at the British Embassy in Tokyo. His first wife had died, leaving a daughter and he later married a local Japanese woman.

He taught English at the Peers School of Japan and for nearly 20 years also read the English news on Japanese Radio right up until 1941 when Japan joined World War II at which point he and his family were reluctantly evacuated to New Zealand. The family had become quite wealthy living in a sumptuous Tokyo house by this time with two servants, all of which had to be left behind.

Upon arrival in New Zealand, the family settled in Wellington and Orde-Lees accepted the rather lowly position of Office Assistant with the New Zealand Correspondence School, in effect nothing more than an office boy. Suggestions were made that he was actually employed as a spy by the British Government, in all events, he became well known around Wellington. He wrote a regular travel column for children in The Southern Cross Newspaper. Shortly before his death in 1958 he was involved in the organisation of the 1955/58 Commonwealth Trans-Antarctic Expedition.

There is some dispute as to Orde-Lees actual age when he died in 1958, the Karori cemetery in Wellington show in their records that he was named Thomas Orde Hans Lees, Order of the British Empire Air Force Cross and died aged 79. Other sources show him as Thomas Hans Orde Lees and give an age at death of 81.

He died an ignominious death of senility in a mental hospital, and lies in a neat, well attended plot in the servicemen's section of the cemetery, just a hundred or so yards from the last resting place of one Chippy (Henry) McNish.

Henry McNish (11 September 1874—24 September 1930), right, often referred to as Harry McNeish or by the nickname Chippy, was the carpenter on Sir Ernest Shackleton's Imperial Trans-Antarctic Expedition of 1914–1917. He was responsible for much of the work that ensured the crew's survival after their ship, the Endurance, was destroyed when it became trapped in pack ice in the Weddell Sea. He modified the small boat, James Caird, that allowed Shackleton and five men (including McNish) to make a voyage of hundreds of miles to fetch help for the rest of the crew. After the expedition he returned to work in the Merchant Navy and eventually emigrated to New Zealand, where he worked on the docks in Wellington until poor health forced his retirement. He died destitute in the Ohiro Benevolent Home in Wellington.



2. Shackleton Expedition Diaries: 1915

In 1916 Ernest Shackleton rescued his crew after the failure of the Imperial Trans-Antarctic Expedition. These entries are a selection from the diary of the expedition's quartermaster Thomas Orde-Lees during 1915 and 1916. They were archived here in 2021, with acknowledgement and thanks, from the Dartmouth University website at www.dartmouth.edu.

September 27th 1915

On the 24th when Wild & his retinue of four dog teams went out to the iceberg about seven miles ahead of us, due west, he was lucky enough to find & shoot on his way back a large female crab-eater seal which had come up out of a small "lead" to give birth to her young. As the weather was thick & the dogs were tired he was unable to bring in the quarry so left it where it fell and in order to lighten it for subsequent transportation carried out the usual procedure in such cases - cutting it open to bleed it and removing the useless organs. It was no surprise to find within it a large living fetus & on separating the umbilical cord the poor little unborn seal also expired.



"The James Caird" - courtesy of Shackleton Endurance Photography

Pressure has been going on intermittently almost ever since the 14th inst., tilting the ship slightly first to one side then to the other until this afternoon it reached a climax by giving the ship such a tremendous nip that her stern was raised nine feet out of the water and the propellor was actually above the surface.

In order to relieve the pressure we were all out on the floe with picks & shovels digging a trench in the ice round the ship, but we got very wet

owing to the trench becoming inundated & I doubt whether we did much good as the ship's side was pressed in five or six inches for about eighteen feet all along the outer wall of the port bunker. Contrary to our expectations she stood it; thank God.

Yesterday Sir Ernest decided to get up steam so we spent all the morning pumping sea water into the boiler by hand. No sooner was it full than a leak was discovered at the bottom & we had to pump it all out again. Meanwhile the water ran along the bilges & flooded my storeroom. I have been all day shifting the cases out of the water quite fifty of them. It was a disgusting job. The stinking bilge-water was eighteen inches deep at one end. I fell into it & got very wet & smelly.

Breakfast - Bacon, porridge.

Luncheon - Ox tongue.

Dinner - Tinned haricot mutton, red currant tart & cream."

October 18th 1915

A mild misty damp day. After the "pressure" of yesterday we thought that things had settled down a bit but it was not to be so.

We were having tea peacefully at 4 p.m. after having spent the greater part of the day pumping out & bailing out the foreward lower hold, when we heard & felt several light bumps, such as we have grown quite accustomed to, followed by one very loud one which aroused our curiosity sufficiently to cause us to casually saunter up on deck.

There are always possibilities of the "pressure" resulting in some interesting spectacle for the mighty forces which can split asunder vast floes of ice many feet thick must always be somewhat awe inspiring when at work, but we were not prepared for what we saw today.

No sooner had we reached the deck than the ship was heaved up suddenly & violently & immediately rolled over slowly onto her side until she lay on her port side to all intents & purposes on her "beam ends". It looked at first as if she must turn turtle. Everything was at once pandemonium. Kennels, spars, sledges, etc. all sliding down the deck & the dogs howling with terror.

We feared at first that many of the dogs were injured if not killed but eventually we found that none were seriously hurt which was really marvellous for the kennels are in batches of about ten weighing with the spars etc. on top of them say half a ton & they were all jumbled up & sandwiched like carriages in a railway accident.

Our first task was to liberate the dogs, & no easy one on account of the weights of the kennels & the difficulty of working at all with the deck at an

angle of fifty degrees & very slippery with thawed slush & blubber all over it. At the time, I happened to be standing against an open space on the port side amidships i.e. the side to which the ship heeled over.

Before I had time to consider what was the most useful thin I could do a kennel just beside me commenced to slide overboard.

October 19th 1915

Temperature 29. Mild & moist. Any amount of work rectifying the derangements of yesterday & refilling the boiler. All the loose wood has been broken up, event the Norwegian "pram" boat, & placed in the bunker for fuel, the blubber being taken out of the bunker where it had been stored since the beginning of the month and placed on deck. With the help of one of the men, McCarty I bailed the rest of the water out of the fore hold & straightened things up a bit.

I had just time to release its occupant "Simian", one of the finest dogs, before the kennel shot out through the open space. Just as I thought it must fall overboard it jammed in some way hanging right over the side & later on it was rescued.

No sooner had I got hold of the dog than the heavy midship kennels with all the sledges & other gear on them came sliding down upon me & the carpenter, jamming us in between these & the kennels on the ship's side, & apparently crushing several dogs. Meanwhile the dogs in the ship's side kennels began to fight the midship dogs who had so precipitately descended upon them.

We managed to keep back the kennels sufficiently to prevent injury to ourselves and until Sir Ernest had gathered "hands" to pass a rope & tackle round them & relieve us of their weight.

Thereafter there was no end of work to do recovering & securing all the sundry gear. All this was very difficult with the deck at such a steep angle of thirty degrees, but some of us got long battens & nailed them down to the deck fore & aft a yard apart & this provided a fair foot hold.

Mr. Wild & I had "braces & bits" and crawled into the kennels to drill holes for the securing ropes to pass through. The dogs couldn't make it out at all to see us crouching inside the kennels whilst they themselves had to sit outside."

October 24th 1915

We had the good luck to secure two seals on 22nd inst. A male & female one year old animals probably & therefore excellent eating, especially the latter as she was not with pup.

I had written the above & had discontinued writing for the evening in order to work the gramophone for the general entertainment of the party, and had just put on the third tune - "The Wearing of the Green" - when a terrific crash shook the ship with a prolonged shiver like an earthquake & she listed over about 8 degrees to starboard.

We finished the tune and then went up on deck to see if anything unusual had occurred. By this time Sir Ernest had been out on the floe and one could judge by his grave look that something really was amiss, & it soon proved to be even more serious than any of us had anticipated for within five minutes we were all hard at work preparing to abandon the ship as she had had her sternpost almost wrenched out and water was pouring in through the crack.



"Endurance bow with Crew" courtesy of Shackleton Endurance Photography

There was little time to ask questions or to comment at all upon the damage for we were working like demons getting up all possible provisions and clothing, navigation instruments, sledging gear, dog food & miscellaneous impediments with a view to quitting ship and sledging over the ice to Graham's Land.

It is surprising what an enormous amount of work can be got through in a given time when one realizes thoroughly that dear life depends on it.

Marston, James & I were working down in the after hold extracting cases close by where the water was coming in down there & we could plainly hear the ominous rush of running water below us, meanwhile the noise of the ship breaking up was deafening.

That Sir Ernest had decided to fill up the boiler some days ago was a piece of miraculous foresight though it was probably more with a view to steaming than to pumping out that he determined upon it.

Some of us who recently ventured amongst ourselves to criticise his decision on this point as being a little premature now feel well reproached for our hasty utterances.

It was, as I said, a mercy that we had the boilers full and the furnaces alight. They were, however, "banked" i.e. being kept as low as possible in order to economise coal, just enough fire being maintained to keep the water hot.

Orders were at once given to get up steam to drive the steam pump and the two engineers...

I was writing the above words when I was cut short by the recommencement of heavy pressure which resulted in our finally abandoning the ship.

We spent an uneasy night but slept on board in our respective cabins. I alone in the hold. It was a little gruesome in the hold by myself with the noise of the water in the ship & pressure groaning outside but I was one of the very few who slept well.

25th: After yesterday's alarms it was a great relief to have a quiet day free from pressure but owing to the leakage we were all at the pumps all day & all night by watches.

The carpenter turned to like a trojan & has worked continuously for 48 hrs. building a coffer dam across the inside of the stern of the ship with a view to minimise the leakage & with so much success already that it has at any rate considerably reduced it. We shifted all stores from aft foreward so as to be able to get the stern out of the water as soon as the ice opens enough to float us again. What with alternate quarter hours on the pump and shifting gear all day it has been hard work, but the life of the ship & ourselves depends upon it and we all work with a will.

For some time past now we have been divided into two watches and have been working more or less as a ship's routine instead of as a shore party expedition as we were all the winter.

This breaking up of the floe is very undesirable just now with low temperature as it seems to result directly in heavy pressure and no real open water exists to any extent anywhere near us. Let us hope, anyway, that the ice movement has subsided & that nothing untoward will occur for the future. Things have been a little too strenuous for us of late.

Meals even have been rather scrappy, the constant shifting of stores makes various items inaccessible in turn so that we have been unable to adhere to our strict order of rotation."

October 26th 1915

Pumping continues ceaselessly day & night and we are able to keep the water under.

Routine work is much deranged.

Until we can manage to dispense with the steam pump it means using up much of our valuable coal supply. I believe we have barely 34 tons left and are now using 3/4 tons daily for pumping only. The engineers are splendid. They tackle the matter with a vengeance and are burning a quantity of seal blubber to eke out our slender stock of coal.

No one who has not seen blubber nor seen it burn can quite appreciate what it is like or what a high value it has as a fuel. In appearance it is much like the fat on bacon if one can imagine the fat of a pig stripped off in one piece about two to three inches thick adhering to the skin.



"Ice Floe" - courtesy of Shackleton Endurance Photography

As used by us it is cut off from the seal with the skin in one great sheet & then cut longitudinally into strips about six feet long by six inches wide which can, if required, be further cut up into small brick-like chunks for convenience in burning in the galley-range. Left in a temperature below freezing the strips soon harden up to about the consistency of the bacon of commerce or harder. The whole of the fat is richly impregnated with oil (seal oil) which forms one of the chief constituents of "train oil" and which

burns fiercely. In the early part of last century seal oil was the principal ingredient of the oil used then for street illumination.

Further heavy pressure took place again this evening lifting first the bows then the stern several feet out of water. We were all out at once digging trenches which helped the ice to break up & pass under the ship. The movement lasted about three hours and closed the leakage at the stern to some extent. In view of having to abandon the ship we lowered three boats onto the floe, sledges & stores, but slept quietly enough on board for the night of the 26th & 27th."

October 27th 1915

Things have taken a terribly serious turn - our worst fears are realized, not that we are in any way downhearted, for whilst there's life, there's hope.

Hitherto I have written of pressure as a sort of abstract manifestation of ice movement - even criticising it, often flippantly.

We have seen so much around us and our stout little craft has out ridden so many of these glacial convulsions that we had become over-confident of her invulnerability.

To have her literally torn asunder beneath our feet as she has been today has come as a rude shock which the consequent discomforts will do little to mitigate.

The ice around the ship had been working all day; the ship merely forming a portion, as it were, of an immense pressure ridge. It is part & parcel of it. If the ship were not where it is the space occupied by it would be filled with great clocks of crumpled floe ice.

As it is, this very ice is straining all the while to oust the ship & occupy its place whilst the ship, crushed laterally to the utmost limit of compression, resists the onslaught valiantly and, by intermittent rising, deflects the great rugged edges of the impinging floes so that they either pass noisily underneath her, lifting her a good deal in so doing, or else they bend upward & snap off in huge slab-like blocks six or seven feet thick and weighing as many tons. In this latter case the blocks are often pushed high up the ship's side before they finally topple over backwards on to the oncoming ice and they nearly always cause the ship to list over to one side or the other.

Pressure had been going on spasmodically all day.

The carpenter was working hard at the cofferdam and pumping employed all hands. We were only just able to keep pace with the leakage. Down aft one could hear the ominous sound of the in-rushing water.

Our little ship was stove in, hopelessly crushed & helpless amongst the engulfing ice.



"Endurance Listing" courtesy of Shackleton Endurance Photography

Nothing that we could do for her was any more good and as before our eyes she commenced to settle down first by the bows then by the stern, we bade her good bye with our hearts. Having accomplished its deadly mission the ice seemed then to play with her like a cat with a mouse, now hoisting her a little now letting her subside once more and as if to having wrested from us our stronghold dangled it before us, as it were, in mocking irony.

The forces of nature had made their counter attack and had driven us out from our position but thoughts of surrender never entered our heads.

Our immediate action lay in making preparations for a safe retirement.

The only question was not what was the best thing to be done but what was the next best thing to be done.

To few is it vouchsafed to see so impressive a sight. Confident as we were of the future such a calamity could not fail to evoke some emotion in the

stoutest heart. Even Wild as courageous a man as there is amongst us admitted that it gave him a pain in the stomach to behold it.

For the first time we realized that we were face to face with as serious a one of the gravest disasters that can befall a polar expedition, beside which mere besetment is a bagatelle.

For the first time it came to us that we were wrecked - that we had abandoned our ship; but we were not beaten. Britishers do not suffer defeat so easily as that.

At one time we expected every minute to see the last of her but strange to say she did not sink.

After settling down so far as to flood all her holds she remained fixed in the ice, well down but by no means entirely submerged.

By 8:30 p.m. everything necessary for our proposed sledging journey to either Robertson Island, Snow Hill Island or Paulet Island ___ miles away respectively, was out on the floe and then, in spite of the danger, we all went on board to have our last square meal - Beauvais pemmican soup, bread, jam, cocoa, tinned fruit and cream.

The cook stuck manfully to his post (in the intervals of quietude) lighting and extinguishing the fire each time for fear of the stove breaking loose & setting fire to the ship.

I went down into the forehold to get up the best things I could find but the water was then four feet deep and many cases were afloat and it was as much as I could do to squeeze in and get out the few articles we had for supper.

We did not let things depress us and even contrived to be merry. Dr. McIlroy was especially cheerful and made one of the usual type of Antarctic puns. "Let's have all we can eat today, Colonel," he said, "for tomorrow we diet." "At what time tomorrow do we die at?", I replied. Rather sinister under the circumstances perhaps, but better than being down-hearted anyhow.

Sir Ernest is now confronted with as big a problem as he has, I suppose, ever tackled: how to extricate us from this serious dilemma and ensure reaching civilization with the whole party alive & well.

As above indicated his intentions are to make over the ice, with two boats on runners and all the dog sledges, for one of the three nearest islands.

It will be a big & strenuous job but he hopes to make 5 miles a day. I cannot but help think that this is altogether too sanguine an estimate over such a hummocky surface intersected everywhere with great pressure

ridges. Without the boats it would be quite possible, but such unwieldy loads cannot but be a serious impediment.

The ship now has a 25 degree list. At midnight there was 6 ft. of water in the lower hold when I went down to my cabin in the manifold for the last time to secure my boxes and penates, a waterproof sheet to sleep on & one or two other oddments, and the lateral pressure was so great that the deck had literally burst under the strain and the planks were all starting up like so many matches pushed out of a box.

The tents were first erected on the port side of the ship, but just as we were turning in the floe began to split up and we hurriedly struck camp and moved everything over a pressure ridge to the other side of the ship & finally turned in dead beat at 1 a.m.

About 4 p.m. came the beginning of the end.

We all felt at once that the crash she received was beyond her power of resistance, and it was so.

She was rising first by the bows then by the stern. Crash followed crash as she vibrated to & fro amidst the embracing ice.

Everyone kept their heads splendidly. Sir Ernest's grand example inspired us all with a confidence in our leader, in a moment such as this, that caused us to look to him for direction in all we did and to work in unison implicitly obeying his orders. For most of the time he stood on the upper deck holding on to the rigging, smoking a cigarette with a serious but somewhat unconcerned air.

To each of us, as occasion offered, he said a word or two of encouragement, such as "Don't forget to take such & such a thing with you if we have to leave the ship." To me, "Mind you put your old diary in my bag as it has been kept rather more regularly than mine, I believe."

It had! Here it is. I don't think Sir Ernest has written as much in a month as I have in a week, though (heavily scratched out) his is, no doubt, better stuff. Still all that is no business of mine, but the point is that his remark on such an occasion was sufficiently irrelevant in the best sense to entirely allay my apprehension for the time as to the ultimate issue.

As previously mentioned, the three boats were already on the floe, but now came the order. "Out all sledges", followed by "All sledging provisions ashore", then "clothing" and at 8 p.m., "All dogs to be taken ashore."

The sledge portion of the aero-motor sledge, the engine pylon of which has never been removed from its huge packing case was finally got out and the upper hamper hacked off it in view of using it for the transportation of one of the boats.

The sledging provisions have been for a long time ranged on the upper deck in case of an emergency & now that the emergency had come was not long before they were all hove overboard on to the floe where willing hands removed them instantly to a place of safety. The ice rising up the ship's side greatly hampered this work and exposed us all to serious danger at times, for if one happened to be carrying a heavy case over a slab of ice in the act of breaking up it was quite within the bounds of probability that one might slip down into one of the numerous small chasms which form between the firm ice and the breaking piece, there to be crushed as I have often seen boxes & pieces of wood crushed.

By the exercise of extreme caution & the guidance of providence no accidents at all occurred and we did not lose a single case.

At first the picks & shovels were hard at work but the futility of adopting such palliatives was soon only too apparent and duly abandoned in favour of more profitable evolutions.

The ice reached the upper deck by 6 p.m.; at the same time the stern post was, to all intents & purposes, rent clean out of her. Her stern being raised high in the air we were able to see the extent of the damage & appreciate its utter irremediability.

It was the most impressive sight I have ever seen. Even Mr. Wild, as courageous a man as I know, admitted to me that it gave him a pain in the stomach to behold it. It gave me all that & more, for the first time in my life, I realized that we were face to face with one of the gravest disasters that can befall a polar expedition, beside which mere besetment is a bagatelle.

The portaging of the boats over the great pressure ridge across the bows of the ship demanded the whole of our combined energy & was rendered particularly dangerous by the fact that at the lowest, and therefore easiest place to cross, there was much open water beneath the loose blocks forming the ridge (as shown in the rough diagram below...maybe take this out if no diagram)

Just what one's sentiments are in such circumstances as this it is a little hard to say, for, as so often happens, on these occasions there is so much to be done at the moment of emergency that by the time one has leisure to give it any serious consideration one has become more or less accustomed to the new condition of things, and even in the most extreme cases as long as one has food & shelter and is dry the future always seems full of hope.

Hunger, or even prospective hunger, make a lot of difference to one's outlook.

There is nothing like keeping the body, & hence the mind, well occupied during periods of peril such as we have just passed through.

The state of the weather also causes a strong mental reaction.

A singular little incident occurred on the floe whilst we were getting the stores out. Sir Ernest was standing about 20 yards away from the ship when the ice suddenly burst beneath him rising up into a hummock exactly in the manner of pantomime demon's star trap."

November 1st 1915

This morning broke almost as bad as yesterday; snowing and that mysterious diffused light that one has seen nowhere else but here. A light so strange that whilst it is perfectly bright enabling one to see to do things just as on any other day yet the rugged surface of the floe appears as one unbroken flat expanse & only the very tallest hummocks become visible. The sub-features of the surface & the pitfalls beneath one's very feet are absolutely invisible & yet it is not anything like a mistiness in the air whatever.

The impossibility of hauling the boats for any great distance over the present loose surface is so very evident after our strenuous efforts of the last day or two that Sir Ernest has now definitely decided to remain here where we are to subsist on seals & penguins if possible, saving our valuable sledging food and trust to drifting northward with the pack ice. We may do it yet; it all depends on whether we secure sufficient seals & penguins. We got 3 seals today and one yesterday.

There is also the strong probability of leads opening close to us & our being able to row northwards, but wherever we go to we must endeavour to reach either Snow Hill or Paulet Island.

Today we struck camp at 1 p.m. and pitched again about a quarter of a mile further on and about 1 1/2 miles from the wreck but on an apparently firm old floe which is not likely to split for a long time which we have called Ocean Camp.

We shifted the two boats with the utmost difficulty. The surface is terrible, like nothing that any of us had seen before around us. We were sinking at times up to our hips, & everywhere the snow was 2 ft. deep.

So long as we have the bare minimum of food we shall be all right.

Breakfast - Bovril ration (6 rations) i.e. 6 men's rations for 28 men & 2 biscuits each.

Luncheon - Tea, (no milk or sugar) & 1 biscuit.

Dinner - Boiled seal (no salt), 1 biscuit.

November 4th 1915

Very cold during the night. Misty & cold early but it soon brightened into a magnificent day.

It has been at last decided to make a frantic effort to get some of the stores out of the ship. The carpenter went off early to the ship & directed operations with so much success that he succeeded in cutting through the three inch deck now three feet under water and making so large a hole that many cases floated up.

Others were subsequently raised by means of a boat hook.

The cutting of the hole must have been terribly hard work, for the ship is very stoutly built & the deck is made of three inch planking, moreover even the most advantageous position was two & a half feet under water. It is an act of providence that the provisions happen to be all stowed on the port side of the ship, the side which is now uppermost.

The method employed was chiselling with a large three inch ice chisel sharpened up for the purpose, rigged to a pile-driving tackle & hauled up & down in the manner of a pile driver.

As soon as a long enough slit had been hacked out a saw was inserted & gradually by chiselling & sawing a hole nearly three feet square was made, about two feet from the ship's side and close by the ward-room door, that is immediately over the corner of the hold where the most of the provisions were stored.

Later on a second hole was pierced more foreward and a "fish-tackle" fastened on to the intervening woodwork between the two holes. By hoisting the "fish-tackle" the whole of the remaining woodwork was rent away and the work of extracting the submerged cases proceeded. At times the men were working with their arms in ice cold water up to the shoulder for half an hour at a stretch.

It is really wonderful what has been accomplished by dint of dogged perseverance, skill & toil. No less than 105 cases of provisions have been brought to the camp today representing some two tons of provisions.

What this means to us in our present destitution words fail to express.

Breakfast - Bovril ration (9 rations) & Dog pemmican (1 cake).

Luncheon - Seal steaks fried in blubber, tea & milk.

Dinner - Curried seal, tea, milk & sugar."

November 21st 1915

A wretched day, high temperature & rainy sleet all day. Wind S to S.W increasing about 6 p.m.

Before going further I had intended to more fully describe our cooking & feeding arrangements, but today has been so full of incident that my intentions will have to be postponed in favour of more pressing matter. This morning I went over to the wreck with a sledging party - Wild, Crean, Hurley, Hudson & McIlroy to cut another section of gunwale of the motor boat with which the carpenter is to raise the siding of the other sledging boat, the Dudley Docker, in the same clever manner as he has raised those of the James Caird.

Whilst we were working at the motor boat, I went over to the Dump camp and with the end of an ice axe discovered several useful articles: a box of 25 cartridges, hair clipper, some reels of thread, pairs of socks, a plate & mug, a pillow, and a Jaeger sleeping bag. With this heavy load, I returned part of the way alone rejoining the other party further on. I had to cross a good deal of open water and whilst "dog-trotting" over the lumps of floating slush & ice fell in well over my knees just before reaching the opposite edge of the floe of one lead & got miserably wet in consequence, but luckily I did not lose my ice axe or my booty.



"Ocean Camp" courtesy of Shackleton Endurance Photography

Just previously a seal had come up right alongside me. He seemed rather astonished to see me & was making for the open water again. I was just in time to head him off & felled him with a lucky blow from an ice axe killing him instantaneously & then cutting his throat to bleed him. This was the first seal killed otherwise than by shooting.

Some of the ice was moving very fast, all opening up, no pressure.

This evening as we were mostly taking it easy & reading we heard Sir Ernest call out, "She's going." We were all out in a second & up on the

lookout station & other points of vantage & sure enough there was our poor ship a mile & a half away breathing her last. She went down bows first, her stern raised up in the air. It gave one a sickening sensation to see it, or mastless & useless as she has been she yet formed a welcome landmark and has always seemed to link us with civilization. Without her our destitution seems more acute, our isolation more complete.

Breakfast - Seal steak, 2 bannocks, tea.

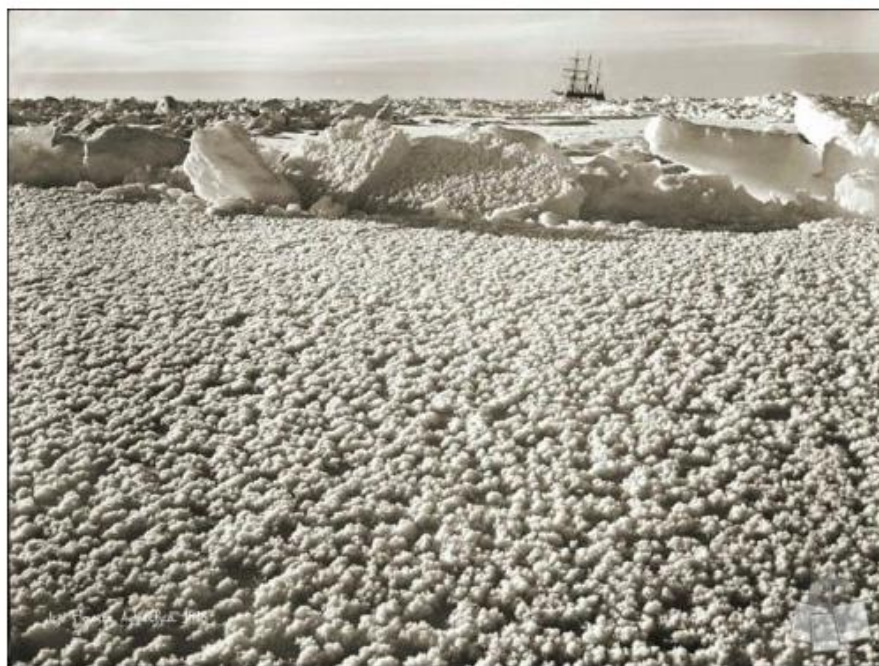
Luncheon - Dry figs & custard, tea (1 tin figs - 2 lbs. - per unit of 4), 1 bannock.

Supper - Seal hooch, beetroot (1 lb. tin per unit), cocoa, 1 bannock."

December 29th 1915

After a further reconnoitre Sir Ernest pronounced the ice ahead to be quite unnegotiable and so at 8:30 p.m. last night to the intense disappointment of all, instead of forging ahead, we retired half a mile so as to get onto stronger ice and by 10 p.m., we had camped and all turned in again without a further meal. The extra sleep was much needed however disheartening this check may be. I slept soundly until 5 a.m., Blackborrow was nightwatchman from 4 a.m. to 8 a.m. kindly lighting the fires for me at that hour. Breakfast same as yesterday at 7 a.m., after which we began to settle down & several dog teams & myself on skis went out seal hunting.

We had only been out a short time when suddenly up went the recall flag on the boat's mast and we all came in at once to find that Sir Ernest had decided to retire another 1/2 mile to a still safer old floe where we camped at 11:30 a.m.



"Ice Flowers" - courtesy of Shackleton Endurance Photography

I first aid two relay trips with the boats all the way and lastly pulled over the galley and served luncheon of tea & 2 bannocks & cold suet (1 oz. per man) which we have been having lately.

Three seals were captured so we have enough meat to go on with for a day or two, but I must say that the general apathy with regard to catching seals now that we may have to settle down for a bit is rather curious.

Unless we get a big store of them it means breaking into our reserve sledging rations and even killing the dogs for want of food and either of these things just now would be fatal to our success, though we shall, of course, have to kill the dogs as soon as we take to the boats.

I spent the afternoon stacking provisions, not that there is much of them now, alas. The weather is pleasant enough, mild in the shade & even hot in the sun, but it has its disadvantage in rendering the surface very soft so that one sinks down to one's knees at every step and one's feet are therefore continually wet. At night the surface freezes but it will seldom support one's weight, & therefore it doubles the weight of the sledge."



"Night Ship Port Side" courtesy of Shackleton Endurance Photography

3. Shackleton Expedition Diaries: 1916

January 16th 1916

A seal came up close to the floe this morning. Wild and I went on skis and he shot it. I went on and soon found another and left a flag on a ski stick to mark the place; Wild came out and shot it and meanwhile I espied yet another from the top of the sloping berg and went on it and killed it with one of my skis and a pocket knife. All three were taken in by dog teams.

In the afternoon I again went out accompanied by Blackborrow on a spare pair of skis which were brought up yesterday from Ocean Camp.

We were lucky enough to find two seals together and after a considerable and exciting chase, stunned them both, on just on the point of entering the water, cut their throats and gutted them, the latter precaution being necessary to prevent them, the carcasses becoming unfit for human consumption in the event of our being unable to send for them for a day or two.

We were at a great disadvantage in the deep, soft snow having taken off our skis to use as weapons!

Whilst engaged upon disemboweling the seals, two Adelie penguins came up right beside us, both of which we managed to secure.

Just as we reached camp, heavy snow, and a southerly breeze sprang up. The snow lasted a short while only.

Hurley's dog team was shot today, seven fine dogs. It is heartrending to see these plucky little animals being ignominiously slaughtered, but it is absolutely unavoidable.

17th: The long desired southerly wind continues good and strong and the temperature has dropped in consequence. The cold makes itself very much felt after so much mild weather. I was out early piloting the dog teams to our captures of yesterday and to my delight we found another seal close to the carcasses. I killed him at once & then went out about a mile to the south the party came on two more seals. Just then the recall signal was hoisted at the camp so the party returned, killing an Emperor penguin on the way. Later Hurley and I went out on ski and easily killed the two seals with an ice ax and gutted them returning to camp just in time for luncheon. I had borrowed Wild's knife and carelessly left it out by the seals, so I had to go out a third time to recover it, and reckon I did the best part of ten miles during the day, but it is well worth it to capture even one seal, let alone three and an Emperor.

They were not sent for as the dogs and drivers having already brought in three seals had done enough, but the carcasses will be safe enough where they are."

April 7th 1916

A fine day again and the island is in sight part of the morning.

We got another sea leopard but no stomach-fish this time. These, undoubtedly, indicate that we are near the pack edge for they prey on the penguins which resort to the edge of the pack about this time of year. The floe split again suddenly just after we had turned in. The watchman calls out "crack" and we are all out in a moment or two, but this frequent splitting up of the floe gets on one's nerves a bit for one never knows whether the ice is going to open underneath one's sleeping bag during the night.



"The Night Ship" - courtesy of Shackleton Endurance Photography

The boats were cut off from the rest of the camp for a time but the crack kept opening and closing and whilst it was closed we got the boats across in safety on their sledges.

April 14th 1916

It was a truly magnificent sunrise, as beautiful a one as we had seen and the brightness and genial glow put new warmth into our half frozen bodies and raised new hopes in our hearts. The spray during the night had frozen on our outer clothing and our Burberry blouses were as stiff as parchment on us. As they thawed out they became correspondingly wet, but when the sun got higher in the sky its warmth, aided by the breeze was sufficient to dry things and we hung out our mitts, socks, etc., on the stays of the mast and got them fairly dry during the day.

During the whole voyage, even on the coldest nights, we found that in spite of our mitts being so sopping wet that we had to take them off from time to time to wring the water out of them, they kept our hands reasonably warm. Or if not exactly warm, they did get so cold as to be in danger of frost bite, though they felt wet and cold all the time, as was only to be expected. In the case of our socks, however, this did not apply and we had to resort to every possible expedient to keep our feet fairly dry.

As it grew lighter, Elephant Island loomed up through the mist on our port hand and for various reasons, thenceforth, became our goal.

It was considered that the precipitousness of Clarence might preclude a landing thereon, and, should we be carried by adverse winds or currents to the eastward we might fail to weather it altogether and Elephant Island was approximately no further off.

If, on the other hand, having set our course for Elephant Island, we should fail to weather it we should still have Clarence Island under our lee to the eastward, and various other small islets if we should be carried to the westward. A lot might happen in a run of forty miles, and we were not for taking any risks just then, so that decision, to run for the central point of the group, received general endorsement.

This morning was a truly beautiful one, we all got quite warm again rowing, Marston in the "Docker" enlivened us with songs and we all felt much happier than we had for several days, confident this time of making the land. If the S.E. wind, which had sprung up, was maintained throughout the day it seemed probable that we should make the land before night fall. Except for sucking ice chips, we had had nothing to quench our thirst with since the milk of the evening of the 12th inst., as whilst waiting for the poor old "Stancomb Wills" to catch up, the "Docker" drew up to a small lump of ice and tried to secure it with an ice axe, but it proved, on closer acquaintance, to be bigger than at first supposed and the attempt to take it in tow by means of impaling it with the business end of the ice axe all but resulted in the loss of that valuable implement. Not having slowed down they overshot it by so much that by the time they had checked their was the

"growler" was far astern of them that it was not worth while "going about" to retrieve it, but coming on another piece they commenced preparations to secure it in a more systematic manner. Just then the "Caird" came up and Sir Ernest, being anxious to proceed, ordered them to desist. This proved unfortunate for, save for a very small fragment of ice in the "Docker", and part of which was subsequently given to the "Caird", we did not encounter any more ice and were thereafter without means of quenching our thirst.

We had too, to wait about of half an hour for the "Stancomb Wills" to catch us up. She had been the lame duck all along, and though her presence added enormously to our resources and carrying capacity, yet she seriously impeded the progress of the other two boats. We could but sympathize with her occupants as, having a wholly inadequate spread of canvas, she was heavily handicapped and her crew had the harder work on the oars, besides which, her low gunwale rendered her much the wettest boat of the three. We never pulled more than four oars at a time in any of the boats so as to work the crews in two watches by half hour spells.

This was a very satisfactory arrangement as it gave one a complete rest between spells but not long enough to get chilled through; one was generally glad enough to get back on the oars, after a resting spell, to get warm again. Signs were not wanting that we were beginning to have about enough of it. More than one of the party in the "Wills" was suffering from general exhaustion, but nothing could be done for them just then. We had to go on. The ultimate safety and resuscitation of the party depended upon our reaching terra firma at the earliest possible moment. Delay was dangerous - dispatch imperative.

Blackborrow, one of the sailors in the "Wills", reported that he thought there was something wrong with his feet, and examination proved this to be only too true; but it was impossible to do much for him under the circumstances, so he had to grin and bear it.

Fortunately severe frost-bite itself is unaccompanied by pain; it is the revival that is painful. There was little likelihood of Blackborrow's feet reviving at all until we reached the land when proper means could be supplied. Earlier in the morning, Greenstreet in the "Docker" had found that one of his feet had "gone". On taking off his sock he revealed a foot as white as a tallow which I eventually succeeded in restoring to vitality in the classic manner by alternately massaging it and placing it against my bare stomach inside my shirt. Quite the "little hero" that time.

We sailed on and on all morning before a fresh breeze passing a couple of bergs in one of which into which the swell was rolling and breaking against the steep slopes of the berg, with a fine roar. Another berg rather resembled a Red Indian's feathered headgear, but still the land did not seem to get appreciably nearer.

Of pack or drift there was none. It was evident that we had a clear run to the land. All depended on the wind. At 3 p.m. it died down. Two hours later heavy lowering skies to the N.W. betokened a storm brewing and at 5 p.m. the sot burst upon us with a strong S.W. wind. We were apparently about 8 miles from Elephant Island before the gathering darkness shut if off from view; in reality we were more like 18 miles off, but we were able to see the details and configuration of the land very clearly, though we afterwards found out that what we took to be rocky cliffs a couple of hundred feet high were actually mountains as many thousands.

For some time we had been feeling the effects of thirst, and, having no ice left, we now took to chewing raw frozen seal meat for the sake of the moisture in it, and very good it seemed to be at that juncture.

It now grew very dark, the gale increased, the seas, lashed into foam by the wind, dashed over us in spray chilling us through to the marrow, and we were not wrong in supposing that we were in for yet another night of extreme exposure. But all the while, we felt we were nearing land, the land that would dispel all our troubles. The wind now veered round to N.W. and this brought the sea full on our port beam. We were able to sail well enough on this "slant" but the change of wind caused more and more water to break over the boats and we had to resort to almost continuous bailing.

Before the night had fairly set in, the "Caird" took the "Wills" in tow and henceforward never let go of her. Sir Ernest hailed the "Docker" and she drew up along side him, he shouted out some directions but his voice was almost wholly inaudible above the storm, though, as we correctly assumed, he was enjoining them to follow and keep in sight of the 'Caird" all night. Practically ever since we had first started Sir Ernest had been standing erect all day and night on the stern counter of the "Caird", only holding on to one of the stays of the little mizzen mast, conning our course the whole time the boats were underway.

How he stood the incessant vigil and exposure is marvellous, but he is a wonderful man and so is his constitution. He simply never spares himself if, by his individual toil, he can possibly benefit anyone else.

A characteristic instance of his unselfishness in this was occurred in the boats. Hurley lost his mitts, Sir Ernest seeing this, at once divested himself of his own, and in spite of the fact that he was standing up in the most exposed position all the while, he insisted upon Hurley's acceptance of the mitts, and on the latter's protesting, Sir Ernest was on the point of throwing them overboard rather than wear them when one of this subordinates had to go without; as a consequence Sir Ernest had one finger rather severely frost bitten.

Captain Worsley in the "Docker" too stuck to his post gallantly hour by hour steering his boat skillfully to safety, sitting up in the stern wet through to the skin. Lt. Hudson and Crean who steered the Wills alternately are likewise deserving of the highest praise.

We again did the best we could during the night pulling the tent clothes over us to afford some protection from the cold and wet. We were under reefed sail all night, rowing became out of the question early in the evening owing to the roughness of the sea.

We had to bail almost continuously and as this was much hindered by the encumbrance of baggage over the well in the stern we several times contemplated throwing certain articles overboard as the necessity of access to the well became more and more urgent and finally in the "Docker" we ejected the greater part of the sack of seal meat. About midnight, Cheetham, our old sailor-officer in the "Docker", thought he heard the boat's back cracking and so there was nothing for it but to shift some of the cases from forward aft, a task of no small difficulty under the circumstances, and thereafter they had all to crowd down in the stern and keep on shifting every time that bailing was in progress. Wave after wave dashed its spray over us and we got miserably wet.

The "Docker" had no light but the "Caird" had a lamp which she exhibited from time to time and by means of which the former were able to keep in touch with her for some time.

Having no light and only a pocket compass which was quite invisible in the dark, Captain Worsley elected to keep his boat as close to windward as possible, so as to keep both the land and the "Caird" under his lee. He feared too that the wind might have veered still more to the northward. As a result, he finally failed to the "Caird's" intermittent light any more and thereafter was, so to speak, "on his own".

The boat made a great but more leeway than headway. After, we wondered whether we might not ultimately overshoot the land, if we had not indeed already done so, by passing between Elephant and Clarence Islands, so much longer was the way than we had expected it to be. At times we thought we saw the faint "blink" of Elephant's snow cap right ahead of us.

About 3 a.m. the moon rose and some diffused light penetrated the barge but the moon itself was not visible. Only twice during the night and after repeated efforts, did we succeed in keeping matches alight long enough, under the tent cloth, to see the little compass and so enable Captain Worsley to verify his course and the wind.

One of two of her crew now noticed that he was showing signs of succumbing to his unceasing vigil; several times he did not seem to hear them speaking to him, finally they could get no replies from him, his head

sunk on to his chest and he seemed on the point of collapse, so they persuaded him to lie down for a bit and let Greenstreet take the helm.

Now the night was nearly done; the worst experience of all our trip was coming to a happy conclusion, but just what the issue would be we were still in some doubt as we could not yet certainly see the land."



"Hurley-Shackleton Patience Camp" - courtesy of Shackleton Endurance Photography
