

# Icebreaker Earns Unique Distinction

## Trip Described in Letter to Parents Of Ernest Sutton

The following excerpts are taken from a letter written by Ernest R. Sutton to his parents, Mr. and Mrs. R. J. Sutton, 807 Bennett st., Medford. The letter is dated Feb. 19, 1957.

"Dear Dad and Mom: You are probably wondering why your letters have gone unanswered for so very long. Well the fact is, we have not received or had any mail taken off the ship since December 7th.

"Right now we are heading for Punta Arenas, Chile, after completing our Antarctic mission. We are due to arrive there around the 25th of this month.

"We got underway on Dec. 8th for the Weddell Sea—ultimate destination Cape Adams on Bowman Peninsula. In Antarctic history no ship had ever been able to penetrate this frozen sea further than Duke Ernest Bay. Crossing from the Pacific into the Southern Atlantic ocean about 9 Dec. we ran into some pretty wild seas that caused our small icebreaker to do 25 to 50 degree rolls. Believe it or not I didn't get seasick. After 10 days of this we entered the Weddell Sea ice pack on Dec. 17, crossing the Antarctic circle on Dec. 20. About this time the Task Group Commander Capt. Edwin A. McDonald, who was also from Medford, transferred to the Staten Island.

### Describes Job

"Before I go any further I'll tell what my job was. I reported happenings that were significant to the Chief of Information in Washington, D.C., by radio message for national news release. And since the TG was from Medford maybe you've read some of my stories in the Tribune.

"On the 22nd of Dec. while trying to reach the Antarctic coast we became beset in the ice off Cape Norvegia. In four days we only were able to travel 32 miles. And on the 25th and 26th were stuck so fast in heavy pressure ice that we couldn't move at all. From looking at the place, you'd have thought that it wasn't actually a sea at all but a frozen desert with croppings of icy ridges and valleys as far as the eye could see and then some.

"On the 27th the winds changed and loosened the ice against the shelf and we were able to sail breaking our way through intermittent ice flows to pond like stretches of water. We gamed the coast and began sailing up along the Filchner ice shelf through a fairly land of many many icebergs shaped like giant aircraft carriers or resembling mesas of the southwest.

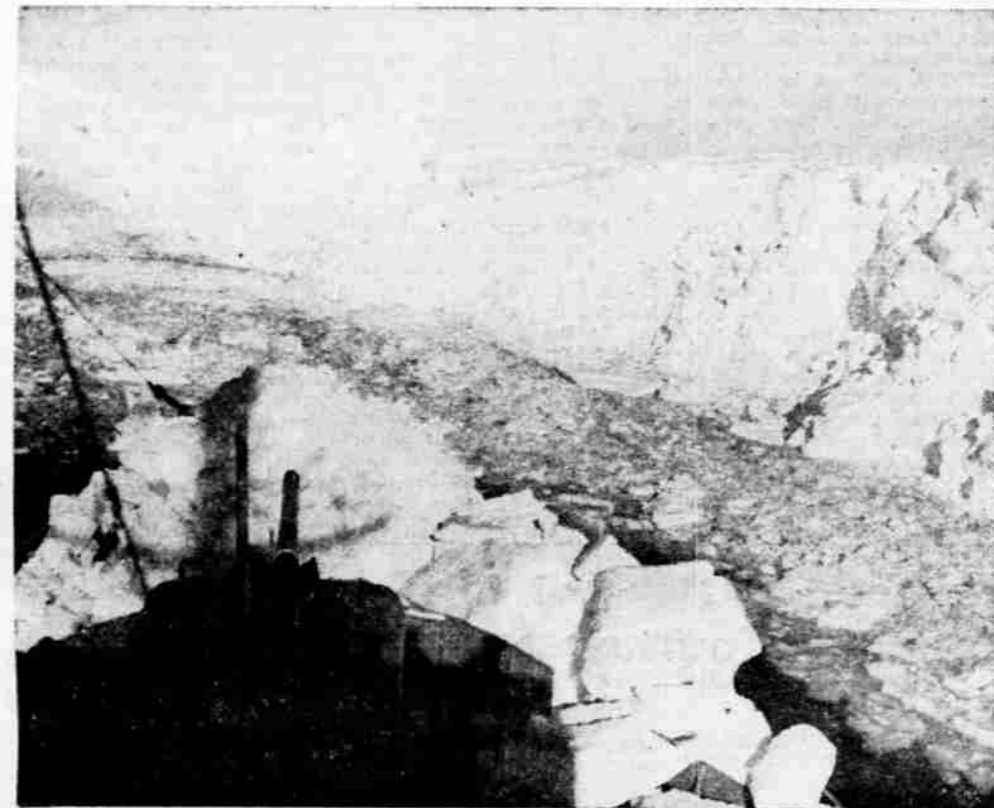
"All this time we were escorting the cargo ship Wyandot. An icebreaker breaks the ice by running full steam upon it, then it cracks under its weight. If the conditions are right, the ice remains open behind the breaker so into this "channel" the cargo ship follows. But since the cargo ship isn't as maneuverable as an icebreaker, the breaker must always try to make a straight channel. An icebreaker has extra armor around her hulls whereas the cargo carrier is relatively thin-skinned. When the pressure or wind is wrong the ice closes up behind the breaker and the channel has to be open again and again before the cargo ship can get through. For the ice could rip her hull like a knife cutting butter.

### Favorable Winds

"For awhile the winds were in our favor and we'd managed to sail deeper into the Weddell Sea than any other ship had ever gotten, when all at once the matter of minutes we were locked tight in the ice on Dec. 31st—New Year's Eve—off Gould Bay. Five miles ahead of us was a twenty-mile lead of open water—but we couldn't move an inch in any direction. Then by New Year's Day even that had been closed up. What we needed was a blizzard coming off the Antarctic continent to blow the ice out to sea. So it went, 1st, no change, 2nd, no noticeable change, 3rd, some helicopter reconnaissance reported a thirty-mile long ice berg was blocking our path some 25 miles ahead—4th, we managed to move up to the Wyandot, 6th same, 7th and on to the morning of the 11th. That morning started just like the others, then in an hour's time with favorable winds the ice opens up just as if God had lifted his hand and changed a desolate desert into water. Through repeated ramblings and glowing against the ice field we got underway reaching the 30 mile ice berg by noon. It took us some 12 hours to steam around 68 miles to its tip, where we were forced to lie to while the Wyandot endeavored to patch seams on her hulls opened by the heavy pressure ice while we were beset. Once, while



**STRAIGHT PATH**—The Navy icebreaker USS Staten Island AGB-5 breaks a straight channel through heavy ridged pressure ice in which the cargo ship USS Wyandot AKA-92 can safely follow. —(Official U.S. Navy Photograph)



**A FULL LOAD**—The Staten Island's forecastle stacks high with snow after ramming the 24-foot high ice shelf again and again to make an unloading site for the USS Wyandot. The ship, appearing to be determined to break away the shelf in one way or another, carries several tons of ice and snow that fell when the portion being rammed repeatedly gave away. —(Official U.S. Navy Photograph)

steaming around the berg, we struck a tongue sticking out underwater, like that which sunk the Titanic, and would have sunk the cargo ship if she had hit it.

"With Wyandot temporarily shored up we got underway again breaking a channel through pressure ice from 10 to 15 foot thick with thickness of 20 or more feet in the ridges. As you know 1/7 of the ice is above water and the other 6/7 below so when you have ice that sticks out above the water around four feet thick—simple addition gives its true thickness. Time Running Short

"By now time was running short because darkness begins to set in down here around the 15th of February and we were some 30 miles off Cape Adams on the 13th of January. They estimated it would take a month to build the base so that wouldn't leave us much time to get out. With an open water lead all the way to Cape Adams, the Staten Island recommended ahead, while the cargo ship tried to patch more opened seams. In the vicinity of Cape Adams we found that a gigantic section of the ice shelf had broken off leaving a shelf some 150 to 200 feet high, this was much much too high for the Wyandot to off-load so we had to retrace our track back out of that area in search of an alternate site.

"Although unable to establish the station at Cape Adams, we became the first ship to ever sail to the headwaters of the Weddell Sea, sound in that area and to map and photograph the limits of the shelf in those remote waters of Antarctica.

"Coming back we again passed the large iceberg and attempted to enter Gould Bay but couldn't. Then, on the farthest edge of the bay, we found a low spot in the shelf. Here we cut away the shelf (it stuck 24 feet out of the water) to make a place for the Wyandot to off-load her cargo. The unloading started on the 28th and the Seabees, F6Y personnel and ships crew began the construction of Ellsworth Station some two miles inland on the 29th.

"While at the unloading site I worked in the photo lab captioning pictures for PIO and Naval history files, printing, processing and gathering information on the unloading at both the camp and at the Wyandot. Many a day we'd put in 18 to 20

hours in the lab and on the shelf.

"With the base 85 per cent complete on February 11th, Capt. McDonald turned it over to Capt. Ronne. Then with the weather changing to the north again, we got underway. With some difficulty we've managed to get out of the ice and are now in open water with some 1,500 miles to go before reaching Punta Arenas.

## 443 Women File for Benefit Payments

A total of 443 Jackson and Josephine county women have filed applications for benefit payments under the new provisions of the Social Security law which permit payments to women at age 62. W. V. Nussbaum, manager of the Medford social security office has announced.

This includes women formerly employed under social security, wives of retired workers, and widows of deceased insured workers, he noted.

Payments to retired women workers and wives of retired workers are permanently reduced if benefits are claimed before 65. However widows of deceased insured workers receive the full amount to which they would have been entitled at age 65 under the old law, Nussbaum said. Payments applied for before the end of November 1957 can be made retroactive to November 1956.

## Second Regional Police Class Slated Monday

Traffic Enforcement and Rules of the Road will be the subject Monday for the second class in the Oregon Regional Police school being held during the month in the council chambers in the city hall.

Lt. William H. Smith, Eugene Police department, will instruct the class for county law enforcement officials.

Editor's note: Ernest R. Sutton, son of Mr. and Mrs. R. J. Sutton, 807 Bennett st., Medford, a Navy journalist, was aboard the USS Staten Island, an icebreaker which escorted the cargo ship, USS Wyandot, into Weddell sea in the Antarctica this winter during Operation Deepfreeze II.

Also aboard the Staten Island was Capt. E. A. McDonald, commander of Task Force 43.7, and who also is from Medford.

Sutton, in a letter to Herb Grey, Mail Tribune advertising manager, noted that Capt. McDonald "was responsible for command decisions and likewise also decided on matters that affected both ships" while they were caught in ice in the Antarctica.

Sutton's wife, Alice, is the daughter of Mrs. Homer B. Johnson, 939 Oakgrove rd., Medford. Mrs. Sutton, he said, is now living with her father in Oroville, Calif.

"I noticed that the IGY (International Geophysical Year) wintering-over party was using two Tucker Sno-Cats and I understand their machine is being used by the Argentines, too," Sutton wrote.

## Staten Island's Trip Is Described By Medford Youth

By ERNEST R. SUTTON  
Navy Journalist

After 3,600 grueling miles and 60 hard days in Antarctica's frozen deserts, the officers and men of the Navy icebreaker USS Staten Island earned the unique distinction of being first to conquer the treacherous Weddell Sea, a feat that explorers and brave men have sought to accomplish for nearly two centuries.

The Weddell Sea, a challenge to all Antarctic explorers since James Weddell discovered it in 1822, has been branded as impenetrable through the years by such noted explorers as Dumont D'Urville in 1823; Sir James C. Ross, 1843; Capt. C. A. Larsen, 1894-1902; Wilhelm Filchner, 1912; and Sir Ernest Shackleton, 1915.

Before the Staten Island odyssey, no ship had ever reached the headwaters of the Weddell Sea at Cape Adams, Bowman Peninsula. The 6,900-ton, 10,000-horsepower Navy icebreaker, commanded by Commander James B. Elliott Jr., USN, of Garrett Park, Md., is destined to go down in history. She was the first ship to fight her way through what William H. Hobbs, noted American geographer, has termed the heaviest area of pack ice on the surface of the globe.

Official Word  
While on the MSTC arctic resupply mission in August, 1956, Captain Elliott received official word that Staten Island had been selected for the task of escorting the heavily-loaded, thin-skinned cargo ship, USS Wyandot, in to the vicious Weddell Sea.

The purpose of the mission was to enable Seabees and ship personnel to construct a United States scientific observation station to be occupied by scientists during the International Geophysical Year (IGY) 1957-1958.

This world-wide scientific effort during the IGY is being supported by the United States Navy. Operation Deepfreeze II comprised of 12 ships and an estimated 5,000 men, encircled the Antarctic continent this winter and founded five new bases and resupplied two constructed last year during Operation Deepfreeze I.

The Staten Island departed Seattle, Wash., Nov. 3, 1956, and on Nov. 19 arrived at Panama, Canal Zone, to rendezvous with Commander Task Group 43.7, Captain E. A. McDonald, USN, in the USS Wyandot, which had departed Davisville, R.I., with Seabees, civilian and naval IGY wintering-over party, supplies and construction material.

South America  
Staten Island and Wyandot steamed along the western coast of South America, stopping briefly at Valparaiso and Punta Arenas, Chile. Staten Island was the deepest draft ship ever to transit the narrow Inland Passage of southern Chile.

The Task Group weighed anchor on Dec. 8 at Punta Arenas, the point of departure of many Weddell Sea ventures. Passing through the Straits of Magellan, Staten Island severed all communication with the outside world, except by radio, until its return months later.

For 10 days the ships were rocked by 35 to 50 degree winds in the turbulent Scotia Sea south of Cape Horn. On Dec. 17 the Task Group entered the Weddell Sea ice pack, where Palmer found entry impossible in 1822. Staten Island began forging a channel through which the Wyandot, stationed 300 yards astern, could steam safely.

Solid Pack  
The icebreaker pushed through the solid pack that stretched from horizon to horizon, crossing the Antarctic Circle Dec. 20. Fighting her way through 600 miles of Weddell Sea Pack ice, the Staten Island arrived at Cape Norvegia, Antarctica, Dec. 22, the earliest ship arrival in recorded Antarctica history.

But after sailing only a few miles alongside the continental ice shelf, northerly winds started the ice to grip the sides of the ships. Staten Island found a small polynia for the Wyandot where she would be free of pressure.

When the pressure of the frozen sea eased slightly, the Staten Island hewed out nine more miles that afternoon, 19 Dec. 23; but on the 24th, was stopped by the pack, which seemed to extend into infinite space.

The ships were forced to lie for two days over Christmas while awaiting southerly winds to ease the tenacious hold of the ice. During this time Wyandot discovered that the tips of three blades had been snapped off her single propeller.

Finally on Dec. 26 southerly winds eased the pack sufficiently to enable the two ships to start westward. Although able



**RETURN TO GOULD BAY**—Before retracing their tracks from Cape Adams, the Task Group commanders scan charts for a possible site for the Ellsworth Station. They decide to return to Gould Bay where a site for the base had been sighted by aerial reconnaissance earlier. Left to right, Capt. F. M. Gam-

bacorta, USN, C.O. USS Wyandot, Capt. E. A. McDonald, USN, Commander Task Group 43.7, of Medford, Ore.; Capt. Finn Ronne, USNR, prospective C.O. of Ellsworth Station, and Cmdr. James B. Elliott, USN, C.O. USS Staten Island. —(Official U.S. Navy Photograph)

to maintain a forward speed of 10 knots, the Wyandot was now even less maneuverable because of her damaged propeller. This necessitated the Staten Island to hew a wider and straighter track through expanses of sludge, hummocked and pressure ice, broken by infrequent patches of water.

The Cape Adams destination still lay 1,200 miles ahead through ice, snow, and water never penetrated by man.

The ships were in an ice-capped sea, an awe-inspiring world of Antarctic goliaths, huge majestic icebergs. Some were jagged like miniature mountains, others flattened and rising sharply upward 100 feet or more from the pack, like the mesas of the southwestern United States.

Weird Wonderland  
Through this weird wonderland, Staten Island forged onward, creating a path by repeated backing and ramming, aided by her hovering eyes aloft in helicopters, searching out open water leads and transmitting tactical directions.

Then on Dec. 29 in helicopters from the icebreaker's flight deck, Captain Finn Ronne, USNR, famed Antarctic explorer, and Task Group Commander Captain E. A. McDonald, USN, visited the United Kingdom's Halley Bay base.

The visit, made to gain knowledge of prevailing ice and wind conditions, was Halley Bay's first contact with the outside world for over 10 months. The Task Group was again the earliest ship arrival on record.

Repeat Performance  
Two days later a repeat performance of the Halley Bay sortie was made at Shackleton Station. Twenty miles beyond Shackleton lay the "unknown" where no hips had ever sailed.

At 4 a.m. Dec. 31, as a helicopter took off to transport a photographer to Shackleton, it suffered an engine failure. With much effort the pilot was able to crash the 'copter onto the flight deck rather than in the freezing water. Both men escaped uninjured. The helicopter's twisted skeleton was scrapped for spare parts. The frame was heaved onto an ice floe some sixteen hours beyond Shackleton.

Simultaneously Staten Island became beset near the burial place of the helicopter in un-sailed waters off Gould Bay. She was beset in the heaviest pressure ridge yet encountered by ships and men on New Year's Day, 793 miles from Cape Norvegia. The gatted helicopter frame, some 500 yards ahead of the two ships where ice pressure had forced it, rested on a ridge which was to become known as Helicopter Hill.

The frustration was heightened by the fact that helicopter reconnaissance had reported a 20-mile open water lead that started only five miles ahead. Northerly winds continued as nature slowly closed even that last avenue of escape.

During those first days of the new year, Staten Island found herself firmly beset in a solid wall of ice 10 to 15 feet thick while the Wyandot rested in the comparative safety of a meager patch of water between two floes.

Periodically the pressure eased and Staten Island vainly tried to break free, but each time, she was stopped by Helicopter Hill.

Impending Darkness  
The impending darkness of early February was drawing nearer. Time was running out. The Task Group had to allot eight weeks for the construction of the Ellsworth IGY station. To get out of the Weddell Sea, the ships would have to start on their outward journey before total darkness descended on the Antarctic continent.

Finally, just after 1 a.m., January 11, a small crack in the pack was observed to open near Staten Island. During the early morning hours the crack slowly widened, until by 9 a.m., the breaker was able to free herself, break out Wyandot and resume her westward voyage.

Splitting a path through ice floes 8 to 15 feet thick, the USS

Staten Island, covered only 20 miles in the unexplored water before discovering that two time-weathered tabular icebergs, 27 miles long, blocked the westward course. For the next several hours the Group made a detour, traveling 58 miles to get four miles west.

At Iceberg Valley, an open water stretch between numerous icebergs, the formation hove to while Wyandot repaired a cracked seam in her number two cargo hold.

The Task Group had only 250 miles to go to Cape Adams. Underway through the last hurdle on Jan. 12, Staten Island fought through ice floes 6 to 16 feet thick. Then, Heartbreak Ridge. A pressure ridge 30 feet high confronted the icebreaker. For 26 hours the Staten Island hacked away at this ridge before she finally broke through.

In a devil's fairy land, strewn with icebergs, large ice floes and sheer ice cliffs, the ships struggled, through waters never before sailed; until on Jan. 15, within sight of Cape Adams, the Task Group suffered a tremendous disappointment. Although the Navy icebreaker USS Staten Island had been able to conquer the Weddell Sea, she was unable to conquer the continent.

After slugging it out for 1,800 miles in Antarctica's heaviest ice and snow conditions, the Task Group discovered that all sections of the ice shelf in the Cape Adams area were sheer cliffs 150 to 200 feet high. It was impossible for the Wyandot to off-load her cargo. The Task Group was directed to turn eastward to look for an alternate site.

During this transit, Staten Island lost a blade from her port screw and had one 2,000-hp main engine put out of commission when a three-ton crankshaft broke.

Retraces Tracks  
Battered and slowed, the icebreaker retraced her track to the Gould Bay area. En route it once more encountered the two long icebergs that acted as a gigantic traffic jam to Weddell Sea transit. At last on Jan. 27, by repeatedly ramming the continental ice shelf, Staten Island sliced off the ragged edges to create a smooth pier for the cargo ship.

With the USS Wyandot busy unloading her five holds, Staten Island aided the Seabees in constructing Ellsworth Station, at Latitude 77°-43' S., Longitude 41°-07' W., sending three-quarters of her crew onto the shelf on round-the-clock, 12-hour shifts. In this manner the station was completed in 15 days, a job the experts had said would take two months.

During this period, USS Staten Island engineering personnel replaced the main engine crankshaft that had been broken. To accomplish this the crew had to completely disassemble the 18-ton engine, raise the 9-ton casting four feet in the air, transport the three-ton replacement crankshaft from the after part of the ship to the forward engine room, install the new crankshaft, and reassemble the engine. In two weeks the men completed a task that would be classified as a major job in any Navy yard.

Construction Completed  
With the construction of the Ellsworth Station completed on Feb. 11, it was turned over to Captain Finn Ronne, who accepted it with great praise for the courage displayed by the officers and men of the Staten Island in reaching the base's remote site.

Shortly after the commissioning ceremonies, the USS Staten Island broke a channel for the Wyandot through new ice beginning to form alongside the Antarctic continent. Out of Weddell Sea pack ice on Feb. 17, the Staten Island began her long 10,000-mile trip to Seattle.

After stopping at Punta Arenas and Talcahuano, Chile, and Callao, Peru, Staten Island will return to her home port of Seattle in early April for a shipyard overhaul period before departing for the Arctic.

## Medford Men Seek Committee Posts

Three Medford men will seek committee position nominations Monday at the state apprenticeship council meeting in the state library building at Salem.

Medford committee candidates include Philip R. Stump for employer member of the Jackson-Josephine counties bricklayer trade apprenticeship committee; R. L. Batzer for employer member of the local carpenter trade apprenticeship committee; and George Beltz for secretary of the Jackson-Josephine counties pipe trades apprenticeship committee. There are 89 vacancies on 32 apprenticeship committees throughout the state.

The council meeting will be open to the public for discussions of trade training questions, according to Labor Commissioner Norman O. Nilsen, council chairman. Gov. Robert D. Holmes will give a brief address at the morning session.

## COMMISSIONER HERE

Clarence F. Hyde, Oregon real estate commissioner, was in Jackson county last night to install officers of the Ashland Realty board. The installation ceremony was held at the Mon Desir Inn.

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