

Letters from the Land of Ice



by
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Introduction

As a sequel to the Video, “The Last Cruise Of The EASTWIND”, here are the details of life aboard this polar icebreaker, a veteran of both Arctic and Antarctic duty, as she winds up twenty-four years of service in the United States Coast Guard.

PROLOGUE

This is the story behind the “Last Cruise Of The EASTWIND”, a pictorial video of the activities of this venerable twenty-four-year-old Polar Icebreaker Cutter of the United States Coast Guard in the Arctic spring and summer of 1968.

EASTWIND, one of four vessels of her class, was built in 1944, destined for nearly twenty polar expeditions. Her first mission in World War II was to northeast Greenland. There she fought her way through 10-foot ice to rescue two men in a small boat lost from an Allied patrol. Proceeding still further northward, she sighted a German Weather Reporting Station and during the next 15 days she captured the station, its valuable documents, and a German expeditionary vessel. The rest of the war was spent working in thick polar ice ferreting out various enemy infiltrations.

At the war’s end she made numerous and varied trips to the Arctic regions until in 1955 she participated in the first Operation Deep Freeze in Antarctica, continuing this duty in subsequent alternate years.

When a ship leaves home-port for long deployments of six or more months to work in far-away places, often under arduous conditions and in locations not noted as vacation spots, the families and friends left behind often wonder just what their crew member is up to. It was to this end that I prepared a series of reports to be sent to “Dear Friends” to cover our activities in 1968. The letters quickly became popular to the extent that our mailing list by the end of the cruise was almost one thousand.

The video referred to above was prepared from consumer-type movies taken of high points of the cruise. However there was much of interest that went on of which no photography was available. Here is an abstract of the several letters I sent to our Dear Friends at home throughout the cruise.

CHAPTER ONE

30 March 1968

Dear Friends:

The EASTWIND has again been called upon to perform some unscheduled duties. First, we were ordered to prepare for a special trip to the Great lakes, a first attempt to have a large Polar Icebreaker navigate the Saint Lawrence Seaway and open the shipping season in Lake Erie earlier than normal.

Much preparation was required for this trip since unusual line handling procedures are required in the several locks in the Seaway. Special fenders had to be fabricated by the ship's force to protect the hull as she scraped her way into the locks. Ships that run up here regularly have special booms that swing out to put a man ashore to handle mooring lines. We, being short and fat for icebreaking a path for others to follow, had to devise a different method for getting our people ashore quickly, as often wind or current would set the vessel away from the lock entrance wall. EASTWIND had a derrick on each side to normally lower away the ship's boats. Because it was painfully slow to operate, we made a personnel box to hold four men which we swung out so they could scamper ashore. For fenders we used 4 x 4 timbers suspended along the sides.

Careful calculations had to be made for loading the ship due to the passage from salt to fresh water increasing her draft. The normal draft of the ship was too great for Seaway limitations anyway so we had to really cut back on supplies and especially on fuel.

During the first week in March, the U.S. Air Force reported a break in one of the telephone cables connecting the North American continent with Greenland and requested the Commandant to dispatch an icebreaker to escort the cable ship during the repair operation. EASTWIND was chosen and we had to hurry up our engine repairs.

We were ready for sea on 16 March and departed Boston heading North. Our first stop was to put in to St. Johns Harbor, Newfoundland for a conference with the Captains of the Canadian Coast Guard Ship LABRADOR (also a Wind-class icebreaker) and the Danish Cable Ship EDVOARD SUENSON. Arrival in St. Johns early in the afternoon of the 19th permitted the crew a short liberty while the conference was held. Fortunately



the day was sunny and pleasant (unusual for Newfoundland this time of year) and many of the crew stretched their legs ashore to inspect this small city. We sailed at midnight.

The cable break was located near Goose Bay, Labrador. We had to run up a hundred miles into the ice pack to arrive on the scene. For many of us newcomers aboard EASTWIND this was a first experience in ice and our first glimpse of an iceberg, a thrill to all except perhaps the Officer of The Watch and the Skipper, both more interested in missing it than in tourist rubbernecking. Many camera shutters were at work on the first berg.

The SUENSON dragged a grapnel for a few hours and around midnight latched on to the cable not far from the broken end and hoisted the bitter end aboard. Now they would normally attach a line to a buoy to mark it and then go off with the other icebreaker escort to drag and find the other broken end. But the concentration of ice was too heavy and the buoy would be torn loose so they asked EASTWIND to come alongside and take the line leading to the end of the cable aboard to hold. Now polar icebreakers are not equipped (like the buoy tender class of Coast Guard vessels) with equipment for handling heavy loads, nor are the crews experienced in such work. However we had up on the fo'c's'le deck a wire rope spool on the anchor windlass, sometimes used as a deep sea anchor or as a tow line. So once more EASTWIND did her duty. We maneuvered alongside the cable ship and passed over our wire for them to shackle on to the cable. This was gingerly done in a heavy swell, strong current and forty knots of bitter wind at 0300 hours.



Our friends in the cable ship departed, saying “now be careful, don’t put too much strain on that cable.” For the next 36 hours we maneuvered to maintain within a few yards of a geographic position. Too much strain and it would part, too much movement geographically and we would drag the cable across itself in loops and it would become useless. Both the bridge gang handling the ship, and the engineers keeping the propellers turning, had quite a workout.

Then came the discouraging word that the SUENSON could not locate the other end of the cable due to heavy ice and was giving up for the time being in this area, and was now heading a hundred miles south to fix another break just reported in a transatlantic

cable. We dropped the end we had so carefully guarded and went south to assist the LABRADOR escort SUENSON through the ice pack.

When we arrived at the new location, we found that the ice had drifted much further south than when we had passed by three days earlier. SUENSON is one of the oldest cable repair ships still in commission, built in 1922. She looks like a beautiful black steam yacht. Unfortunately she is not ice-strengthened and we had to hover over her like a mother hen.

SUENSON again located the break quickly, and this time marked the cable end with a cluster of balloon-type buoys, so EASTWIND only had to keep the balloons in sight and clear of drifting ice. This too was not much fun as the visibility was only 200 yards in a howling snowstorm, and if we failed to maneuver so as to keep the large pans of ice from drifting down on the buoys, the balloons would drag under and we would lose the position of the cable.

New cable was finally spliced on to the other end and paid out as SUENSON returned to our location to splice to our end. Incidentally, these splices take a gang of four men six hours to complete each splice. The men work under a temporary canvas house erected on SUENSON's foredeck.

LABRADOR and EASTWIND steamed in alternate circles at full speed, each running in across SUENSON's bow, and turning hard right (or left) in front of her to keep the fast drifting ice from building up against her and carrying away the cable that we all had worked together so hard to recover. This reminded me of two sheep dogs attacking a wolf in turn, to protect the huddled herd of lambs. It called for much coordination and nice judgment on the part of EASTWIND's helmsmen and conning officers, and certainly permitted no dull moments for the next six to eight hours.

Finally the last splice was completed and the convoy started back up north to try once again for the original cable repair. EASTWIND's crew was holding their breath because unless we completed this job within 48 hours, our liberty plans for Montreal would be jeopardized. Time was getting short.

The going was slow but the 26th of March found us back on location. Again SUENSON performed in a highly competent manner, recovering and buoying off one end in just a few hours. Once more EASTWIND had an all-night vigil maneuvering to



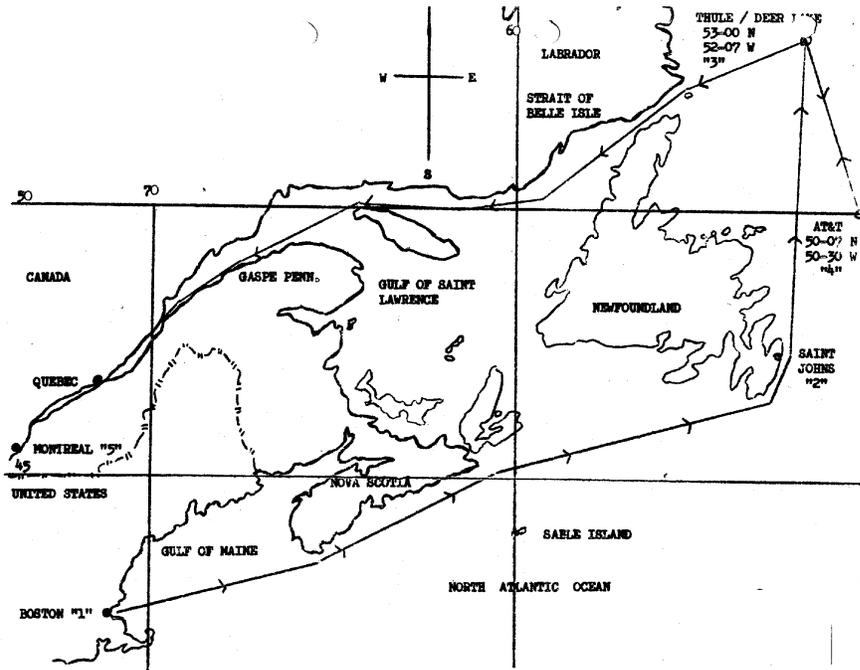
keep drifting ice floes from sinking the balloons. At 0330, SUENSON reported that she had recovered the other end and was starting the first splice. By midnight the following day all repairs were completed and Greenland and the United States had telephone service restored.

Now it was on to Montreal via the Straits Of Belle Isle, alone since LABRADOR had to escort SUENSON clear of the ice and back to

St. Johns, Newfoundland.

We encountered several heavy ice concentrations enroute the mouth of the St. Lawrence River, and sometimes we wondered if we had chosen the right route, as we had to ram and back off, to ram again and again for several hours to get through some snow-covered pressure ridges. But now we are in open water and are looking forward to the pilot boarding tomorrow evening (the 30th of March) at the mouth of the St. Lawrence for the day and a half trip to Montreal.

All of us are looking forward to the scenic cruise up the River, but most of all, to "Mail Call" upon arrival in Montreal. News from home and our loved ones is the best morale booster a sailor can have, other than arriving back to his home port.



CHAPTER TWO

Although not too many days have passed since my last letter—so much has transpired—it seems longer. EASTWIND arrived at the mouth of the St. Lawrence River on Saturday, March 30th and took aboard the first pair of pilots (a total of six in all were used) for the upstream trip to Montreal, 340 miles westward. The trip upstream was rather uneventful and was enjoyed by all except that the bleak end-of-winter appearance of the river banks dampened the scenic beauty which this area affords later in the spring, summer and fall. Our helmsmen had a lively time of it as EASTWIND does steer badly in confined waters, especially when the channel becomes shallow.

We arrived at Montreal Sunday evening for welcomed liberty, and mail call on Monday morning. We found Montreal a very clean city but were disappointed that EXPO was not yet open. We did get to see the buildings and grounds close aboard later since the entrance to our first lock of the Seaway passes right alongside the site of EXPO. Most everyone rode the new METRO (subway) and were impressed with the cleanliness of the stations and the modern cars giving a rapid, smooth, and almost noiseless ride.

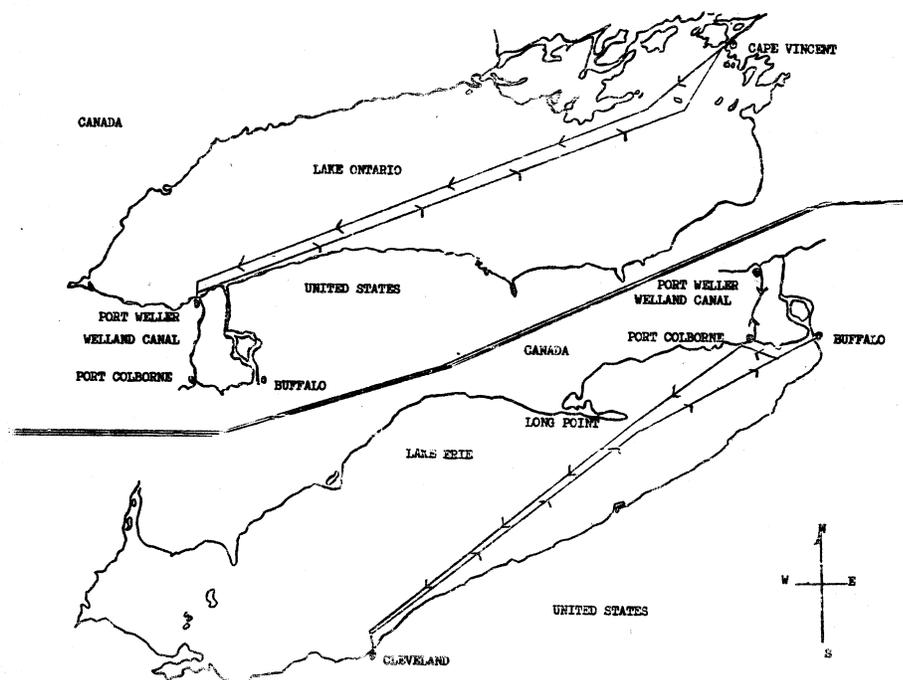
Thursday morning, the day for our departure from Montreal, dawned cold, gloomy and windy. As we entered the first of eight locks in the St. Lawrence Seaway, we were greeted with light snow; but by noon the sun had broken through, and by four o'clock the temperature has risen to 67 degrees.

The river level at the entrance to the Seaway is 20 feet above sea level. From this point to Lake Ontario the vessel travels 182 miles further inland, rising more than 225 feet. The first part of the Seaway consists of five sub-sections, three of which are solely in Canadian waters, the others in international boundary waters. In the American Locks (Snell and Eisenhower) the ship is lifted another 90 feet. Now, the most scenic portion of the trip begins. The Thousand Island section of the St. Lawrence River has long been the summer playground of Americans. Many pictures were taken of the summer cottages, mansions, and even an old castle. Right in the midst of this luxurious playground we passed a fine old house with several youths waving—as we drew abreast we could read the sign “U. S. Coast Guard, Alexander Bay”.

Our passage through the locks was interesting and not like the Panama Canal Locks which many sea-going Coast Guardsmen have experienced. Our pilots had never handled a ship like EASTWIND before and after watching our first approach I tactfully suggested to the pilot that he let me do the locking shiphandling thereafter. I was fortunate in having brought ships out of the Lakes during the war in the old lock system which was even more tight. Our putting the men ashore four at a time worked well and ensured getting sufficient mooring lines out before the wind and current took charge. We always had to lay at the lock wall for some time before entering.

Being pre-navigation season we did not meet down-bound traffic, however by the same token we had to navigate most carefully because the channel buoys had not yet been put out. We had one narrow escape though when in a stretch of river between locks we suddenly lost all propulsion power. The pilot became visibly upset. Still being able to steer, we were able to coast over to the windward side of the channel and anchor. The

anchor drill we had at the dock in Boston a month ago paid off. After an hour they found the fuel valve that had been accidentally shut off and we were on our way again.



After crossing Lake Ontario during the night we entered the Welland Canal, (another series of 8 locks) which was carved through 27 miles of the Canadian mainland, lifting vessels some 326 feet to Lake Erie, bypassing Niagara Falls.

Entering Lake Erie we encountered about 6 miles of what was to us light ice - but which would have brought lake shipping to a complete stop. No wonder the navigation season had not yet begun.

Arriving in Cleveland at 0700 on Palm Sunday enabled church parties to worship at the local churches while EASTWIND took on 100,000 gallons of fuel. Due to the many other chores that had to be done we were not able to grant general liberty prior to sailing at 2000 for Buffalo.

We arrived at the edge of the ice field about 15 miles off Buffalo at daylight on Monday, the 8th of April. It was most timely. The Motor Vessel J. CLAIRE MILLER, bound for Buffalo, had tried to beat the season and was stuck fast in the ice just inside the edge of the field. When a ship is stuck in the ice and cannot move forward or backward, we say she is "beset".



EASTWIND charged off, freed the MILLER from her ice prison and battered a path through 15 miles of packed hard ice toward Buffalo, where the local Coast Guard Tug, OJIBWA joined us to complete the ice escort of the first ship into Buffalo for the 1968 shipping season, more than 10 days earlier than

usual. The Captain of the MILLER won himself a new hat for being the first ship in. We won only the privilege of much hard work in the days to come.

In the following week EASTWIND worked from sun-up to sun-down, shepherding steamers through the 15 miles of ice that prevailing winds had packed into the eastern end of the lake around Buffalo. Great Lakes ice is unique in that nowhere else do we know of slushy ice that when you break it, mashes thousands of slivers and crystals together into a sticky mass that grips the straight sides of low-powered lake steamships, some over 600 feet long, like glue. Our first escort job, the MILLER, was a vessel 61 years old. She still looked sharp and shipshape even after all these years.

One major problem was that the Chief Engineers, having spent the winter overhauling their engines, were most reluctant to give the Captain full speed in the ice.



A few ships with a big powerful engine make it through without our assistance, but the majority that wintered in at Buffalo and are outbound empty, could never make even a mile without our help.



First we broke a path (or followed a large high-powered ship who left a good wide path – for a few hours that is, until the wind closes the ice together). Then we go back and make short herringbone slashes forward and backward across the bows of our beset steamer, and pass down her sides, until she is broken free of the suction of the ice and begins to slowly surge forward under the urging of a wildly thrashing propeller.

Then we maneuver right

up close in front of her to keep the ice from closing in as she pushes forward toward her goal of clear water 15 miles down the lake. Many times during this journey she may again become beset and we have to go back around her, working sometimes as long as an hour before she starts to move again – so helpless are these lake freighters. At last we get our charge out of the ice field, only to go back to find one or two more ships floundering around in the ice, all bemoaning their predicament on the VHF radio.

Well, that is how we spend our days. Fortunately we do not work at ice breaking at night on this job, so we either run back into Buffalo for liberty or we stay out in the ice field to keep our restless charges company.

We hope that by the end of this week, perhaps we will see the end of our mission in sight and be heading home. Everyone had a good time in Montreal, hopefully we will be able to stop again on the way back.

Don't forget that mail from home means more to the crew than even the fine dinner our cooks prepared on Easter Sunday, so keep on writing to your friends and loved ones aboard your favorite Coast Guard Cutter, EASTWIND.

We expect to sail from Boston on 13 June and will go to New York to load ammunition before starting North. Our first port of call will be Argentia, Newfoundland where our navigation team will be briefed on what ice conditions to expect as we proceed further North. Then out to sea we go, northward to Goose Bay, Labrador where we will make a reconnaissance of ice conditions so that the re-supply naval cargo ships to follow will know when they can start North. Following this we will head for the Danish Naval Base at Grønødal in Arsuk Fjord, a port on the southwest coast of Greenland. We are planning to arrive there on 21 June, the “Midsummer Festival” when the natives hold a celebration. This should make for a pleasurable two days of recreation for all hands.

Leaving Grønødal on the 25th we will journey northward 350 miles to Sondrestrom Fjord, the longest and most scenic fjord in all Greenland. An important Air Force base is located at the head of this fjord. At the mouth we will install a temporary radiobeacon as an aid to navigation. Here is where our helicopters will be useful as they are the only way we can transport the equipment to the rocky promontory. Following this task we will tackle the primary reason for sending Coast Guard polar icebreakers into the frozen North. On the 29th we will start the long search for a path through the ice pack for the cargo ships to re-supply Thule, Greenland, a large Air Force base situated many miles further north.

Later we will be joined, in our escort duties of getting the thin-hulled cargo ships through, by the Coast Guard Cutters EDISTO and WESTWIND, but for the moment we will be on our own as EASTWIND thrives in her natural element, the ice pack.

Here is the refiner’s crucible, where all the many skills of EASTWIND’s individual crew members are molded into a common denominator, the Team. EASTWIND has always had a terrific Team – one that unselfishly puts the ship first. I feel confident that the new men who have joined us will be infected with this traditional enthusiasm and that WE, and YOU, will be proud of the future accomplishments of EASTWIND.

The Helicopters are an important part of the Team. Detachments from both the Navy and the Coast Guard alternate years in providing this service. This year we have the Navy team aboard. The aircraft deploy out to 50 miles ahead of the ship to report leads in the ice field which we can head for to make better progress. They can save us many hours of battering against contrary ice floes. I shall leave details of our battle against the ice for our next letter, and proceed on with a brief summary of our intended operations.

Hopefully we will arrive in Thule on the Fourth of July. Notice how we schedule ourselves to arrive on celebration days. No one can say that EASTWIND is not public relations conscious and besides, it gives the crew better liberty.

Thule (pronounced Too-lee) is located far up the western coast of Greenland and only 840 miles from the North Pole. The Fourth of July will be an important day to all of us, not only as a patriotic day and the day opening navigation into Thule for the first time since the previous September, but of most immediate concern, it will be the first mail call that our crew will receive – that is, if YOU write. Remember that all the movies and recreation take second place to mail from home. Please keep it coming.

Sometimes it seems that much time could be saved by omitting some of the port visits and courtesy calls that EASTWIND makes, but these short calls are often the first time a ship has arrived after the long dark winter and the visits are vital to the morale of our Danish and Eskimo friends, and fellow servicemen in these far northern outposts, and is important to our country's relations with other nations.

After we have searched out the best path for the cargo ships to take through the ice pack, we and our fellow icebreakers will spend the next week or two escorting. This is the only time in the year that supplies in quantity can be delivered to Thule, the largest base in Greenland. The escort duty can vary from routine breaking of a path for a few hundred miles in some years when the Arctic ice is light, to a downright slug-fest of several weeks of backing and ramming, with progress measured in only a few miles a day in a bad ice year.

On the 18th of July EASTWIND will break off from escort duty and embark on a special scientific cruise with Coast Guard oceanographers aboard to make a detailed study of the prominent glaciers along the west coast of Greenland. This group will measure and photograph the twelve most active glaciers which are the source of 5,000 icebergs a year. Hopefully, the study will reveal information to allow scientists to more accurately predict the movement and seasons of these bergs, many of which drift southward into the transatlantic shipping lanes.

On completion of the glacier study, EASTWIND hopes to proceed to Glasgow, Scotland, to arrive on 14 August for a short vacation from the rigors of icebreaking. The seven days allotted for our stay will be time enough for all hands to see Scotland and perhaps take a train ride to London. Although a rest and recreation (R&R) trip of this sort is very desirable, there are many operational matters which could require a change of plans – we shall “keep our fingers crossed.”

Leaving Glasgow we plan to journey to the northwest coast of Greenland and up into Kane Basin, to clarify a bit of history. In 1871 during an expedition into the Kane Basin, the leader, Charles Francis Hall, died from what was apparently a natural illness. Now, 97 years later, a biography is being written, and research has indicated the possibility of murder. One of our tasks will be to locate and exhume his remains to examine for any traces of poison. While in the Kane Basin a Navy oceanographic party will conduct a bottom sediment survey and instruments will be lowered to retrieve samples of the ocean floor to be studied to learn more of the geological history of this area.

Sailing southward the first week of October, EASTWIND will exchange Navy Oceanographic teams at Thule, and then conduct the yearly ice forecast survey in Baffin Bay along the southwest coast of Greenland, to allow a more accurate prediction of ice formation and coverage for the following season.

With the dis-establishment of the radiobeacon placed at the entrance of Sondrestrom Fjord, EASTWIND should happily return to Boston, arriving between the 5th and 10th of November, the 1968 Arctic East Cruise concluded.

CHAPTER FOUR

When I complete this letter, we will be approaching North Star Bay in Lat. 76° 35' N, the farthest north that we have been yet this trip, and our goal, Thule Air Force Base will be in sight. We plan to come in the night before our official arrival date (of course in this latitude it will actually be broad daylight, but hopefully everyone will be asleep) to break a path to the dock so that we can come in officially without delay right on schedule at 1000 hours their time. Hundreds of people are expected to greet us since the arrival of the first ship since the previous September is to them a big event. If you-all back home have been doing your duty with paper and pen then it will be a big event to us at mail call.

Now to get on with our voyage so far: Despite a lot of fog we have been able to keep to our schedule as far as Argentia, Newfoundland, where we rendezvoused with our sister ship EDISTO on the 18th and spent a day with the Navy weather forecasters. The next day several of us flew over Baffin Bay to Greenland in a large Navy reconnaissance plane to look at the ice conditions in areas where we were to be operating. Returning in five hours over the route EASTWIND would be taking four days to accomplish made us appreciate today's aviation capability.

We left Argentia in the usual fog that same evening and the next time we saw anything was four days later, having worked our way around small bergs and through patches of six-foot-thick ridged ice floes. We saw the striking mountains abutting Arsurk Fjord, snow-capped with streaks of white running down like miniature glaciers. They looked friendly, but fierce, all at the same time. Greenland has a grim, foreboding look about it, yet still there is something mystical and fascinating. Everywhere it appears as a mountain climber's challenge, but there were no takers.

As we worked our way in past the outlying islands surrounding the mouth of Arsurk Fjord, we broke into clear sunshine which followed us all the twenty miles of winding channel to the port of Grønnedal. Rounding the last bend of the channel we saw in the distance the dock of the Royal Naval Station. Although it was still five miles away, in the clear atmosphere of the Arctic it appeared much closer. Sailors were standing on the dock ready to receive our mooring lines. Even at this remote outpost the Danes remembered their Naval traditions, and things were just as smartly done as if they were waiting for the King's yacht to arrive in Copenhagen. We were glad that we had remembered to fly the Danish flag from the yardarm and that our officers and men were smartly manning the side as well. The next day we made our official calls in full dress uniform, complete with swords and medals.

We had arrived in Grønnedal (Green Valley) (and incidentally it was green – about the only color other than white that we saw anywhere in Greenland except on the native costumes and the hulls of local shipping later on), just in time for the Mid-Summer Festival with its parties, bonfire and fireworks.

Our crew, many of whom were well experienced in US-Danish relations from last year's visit to Copenhagen, soon made themselves right at home with their hosts, even to exchanging parts of their uniform. Although Greenland may not be a friendly-looking country, its inhabitants certainly are, and they go out of their way to be perfect hosts.

EASTWIND was not to be outdone in hospitality, however, and after reciprocal entertainment including an afternoon family cruise down the fjord, all too soon we had to get back to work - departing on duty assigned, and in fog of course.

Arriving several days later off Sondrestrom Fjord (South Stream), and finding an anchorage in a tiny harbor just off the mouth of the fjord, we launched our "birds". Here is where our helicopters began to "earn their keep". We transported six loads of men and materials to the rocky radio beacon site on top of Cruncher Island. Sondrestrom Air Base requires many ships to support it, and the beacon that we established will be very useful for ships arriving later this summer in the usual fog. We also launched one of our ship's boats to explore the island from the water side, and after we had walked up, down, and around the rocks from the landing site to the top where the beacon house was located, we appreciated our "birds" more than ever.

A visit to this area wouldn't be complete without a trip up the fjord, the longest and most scenic one in Greenland.. We arrived at Camp Lloyd about 2100 and since the sun never sets at this latitude this time of year, our crew made a good liberty ashore where an all-girl band was entertaining at the Air Base. We departed the following noon with a fair tide all the way down the fjord, crossed the Arctic Circle for the second time, and soon were well out to sea, testing the radio beacon from a point thirty miles out. The beacon operates only on call when a ship sends a coded signal. The ship can then take bearings on the beacons transmission to help find the entrance to the fjord. We just hope it will keep working the rest of the summer.

As I write this paragraph we are striking out across Melville Bay over to Cape Terk as a sort of modified version of the "North-about Passage". We are now in latitude 74 - 30 N and I wish I could aptly describe the sight that has unfolded from the fog. When there is no fog, the Arctic is simply beautiful. Right now I am standing at the Navigator's chart table, looking out over a broad expanse of white as far as the eye can see, punctuated with occasional pools of gray open water slightly ruffled by the light wind. Even with the Greenland coast clearly in the distance at forty miles, we get a feeling of being alone. There probably isn't another ship within 300 miles of us, certainly not to the north. There are no harbors of any consequence in Melville Bay and few, if any, Eskimo settlements. As I look about the horizon I count thirty-seven icebergs, all of different size and shape. Some have flat tops like an aircraft carrier, some have cathedral spires. One berg is just a needle sticking out of the pack. What's that over on the port bow, a full rigged ship? No, just another friendly (?) iceberg. Our radar shows a mass of bergs and we are glad that the weather has cleared.

There is a gray cloud cover with a bright band of sunlight covering the entire northern horizon. Beyond the silhouettes of the bergs you can see the coastal hills, not as steep as those in south Greenland. There seem to be more unusual shapes to the hills though, and certainly there is color in them tonight. The giant ice cap gleams silvery beyond the hills and even its ridges and vertical crevasses can be distinguished in this ever-so-clear arctic atmosphere. All this we are seeing at 2300 hours of our shipboard evening.

CHAPTER FIVE

We arrived right on schedule at Thule, across a bay full of hard ice. It was a good thing that we had broken the path the night before as planned, or we would have struggled to ram our way alongside the pier and not been able to dock with a flourish. It was a gray morning, not unlike many we have experienced north of the Arctic Circle. However, on the other side of the coin there have been plenty of bright sunny (and warm) days, and believe me, there is nothing so exhilarating as pushing through a solid ice pack, gleaming white, punctuated by an occasional seal (unfortunately there are no polar bears here yet) and breathing in a crisp, clear atmosphere in which you can see land fifty miles away. But when the ice becomes so thick that you have to back up and ram in order to break through, and your progress is measured in yards instead of miles, then you realize that you are NOT on a yachting cruise. So far, however, EASTWIND has not yet found her match in this year's Arctic ice. Generally we breeze through, using all six engines, at from 7 to 9 knots.

The wind freshened up before we were docking and the icy blasts discouraged some of the spectators. Generally there would be several hundred people down on the pier to watch the first ship of the season come in. The Colonel commanding the Base and I exchanged our welcoming speeches (and made them short) and soon the ship was open to visitors—those hardy souls in their “Eskimo-type“ parkas who had come down to welcome us. We had already sent our helicopters in earlier to get the many bags of mail (that's right, you, our friends, did not disappoint us). I was glad that we had allowed extra time in our arrival so we could catch up on that most important ingredient in the porridge called morale, mail from home.

Thule has all of the facilities of any modern large Air Force base: exchange, chapel, gym, clubs, even dry cleaning and laundry service. The buildings are all rectangular, aluminum-sided, and not very aesthetic looking, but some of the interiors such as the clubs, are fashionably appointed.. We were made most welcome and spent three pleasant days before duty called us afloat again.

This time we embarked a professional movie-making crew (with a huge mound of equipment), and having several days to wait before escorting our first cargo ship in, we ran through the ice pack looking for big chunks of ice to hit for the benefit of the epic-makers. Several days of good weather fortuitously arrived and soon we were winding up the last shots, having found a large berg with a hole eroded through, a so-called “porthole” or arch-type iceberg, not too commonly found, and one that makes a terrific “frame” for a picture of EASTWIND. Launching our boats, we made it possible for everyone in the crew who wanted to, to shoot his own personal film of our ship, framed in its natural element.

All too soon came the message that the U.S. Naval Ship TOWLE, a Victory-class WW II-type steamer of 10,000 tons, would rendezvous the next day just above Disko Island. Just as the TOWLE hove into sight our friend (?) the fog closed in, and except for one fairly close call when we were stopped by an ice ridge (and she wasn't) we never

saw her again until we entered the approaches to North Star Bay at Thule. We knew where she was, of course, thanks to radar, just 400 yards astern, right in our track.

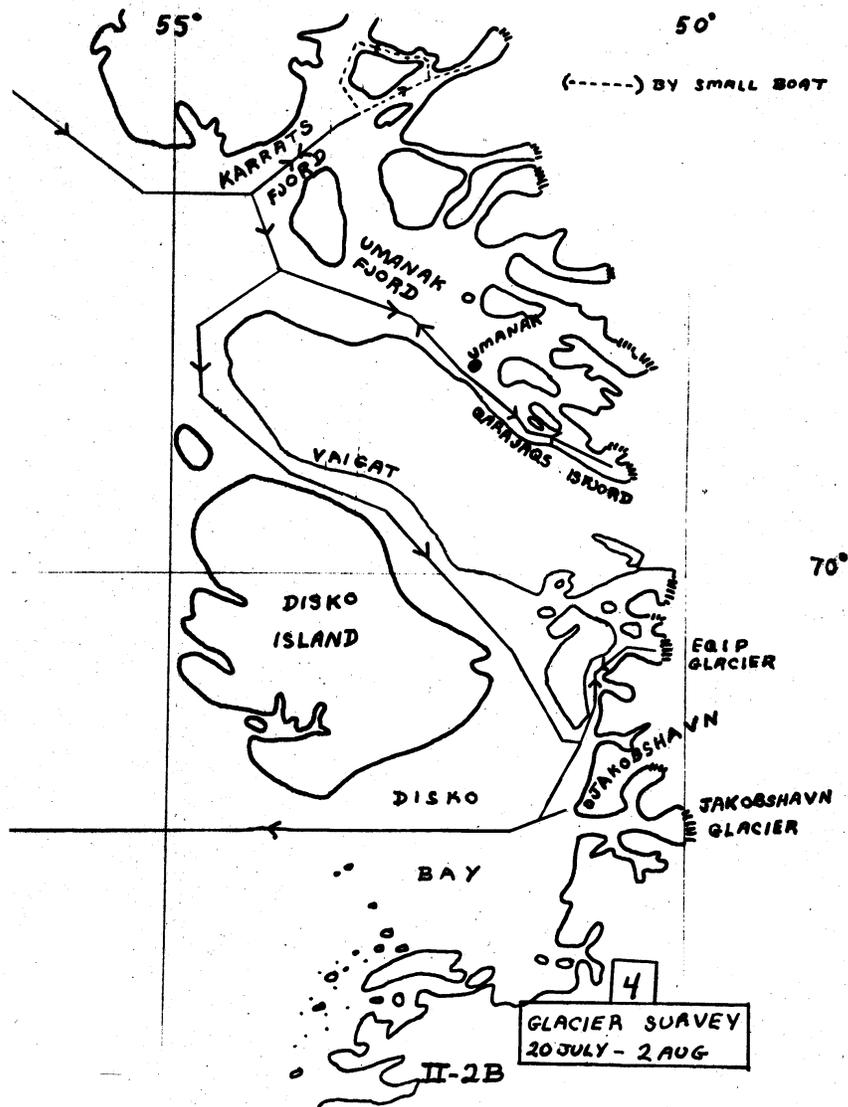
One gets a sort of eerie feeling, knowing that there in the fog just behind us, is a steel giant, belching smoke and thrashing her way with her propeller, and depending entirely on us to get her through the ice pack. You strain your eyes, and often imagine that you see her, even to the extent of suddenly feeling that she is too darn close for comfort, and why don't they drop back a bit – but if they did they would soon come to a screeching (or would it be a grinding?) halt. Then we would have to spend the next hour or so running around breaking her out, as we described in one of our earlier letters from the Great Lakes. Finally TOWLE was moored at Thule and our first task of escort duty (the main reason for EASTWIND's being up here) was complete.

Another two days for replenishment, both for ship and crew, and we embarked on our next assignment, a study of certain glaciers which are responsible for the dangerous icebergs that float down across the Grand Banks to menace shipping. Our scientific party, which flew in from the States on the 18th in a special Coast Guard plane loaded with not only their scientific gear, but also some mimeograph paper (so I could write you this letter) and some badly needed engine parts, consisted of two officers from the CG HQ Oceanographic Unit, and several civilian glaciologists, geologists, and other experts in just about any associated field you can name, including a well-known author and former arctic explorer, Dr. William Carlson, who helped build the Air Force Base in Greenland in WW II.

We are now set up to do underwater photography of the bottom and take samples of soil in deep water basins at the head of a fjord where the glacier ends and calves its way into the many hundreds of bergs of all sorts of imaginable shapes, sizes and descriptions. We take samples of the water at various depths, set up transit surveys of the glacier fronts (to determine in future years the movement of the glaciers) and many other associated functions, all of which are intended to increase man's knowledge of "why so many icebergs", and "how do they get there". This in turn will help the Coast Guard's International Ice Patrol perform its important mission so that a "Titanic" disaster will never happen again.

Our first study area was in Karrats Fjord. Two days underway south from Thule brought us around Cape Cranstown, and we carefully threaded our way around many miles of water completely cluttered (so we thought) with icebergs – little did we know that this maze was nothing compared to the area we had to traverse only a day or so later. We arrived in a basin ten miles in diameter, completely surrounded by beautiful (?) mountains. You have to at least call them majestic, if not beautiful. What really impresses one is the fact that there are so many of them. Karrat Island (uninhabited, of course, like most of Greenland) stood like a towering fortress against the sky. It did not take much imagination to think "what a lovely place for Dr. Frankenstein to create another monster."

We launched our helos with a scientific party in each one to go up the inner fjord another 30 miles to where two ice-producing glaciers were very busy, only a few miles from each other.



I, too, went up for a recon flight, since we planned to attempt another First. You know, EASTWIND has a record of doing "Firsts". She was the first icebreaker to voyage around the world, the first to circumnavigate the Antarctic Continent, sighted the tallest iceberg ever recorded, and was the first polar icebreaker ever to visit the Great Lakes, etc., etc. Well, here was our chance to send the first motor-powered boat up Karrats Fjord. This fjord is usually so choked up with ice flowing from the glacier that no ship could ever possibly get through, and if it did, any shift in the wind could cause an ice jam that would imprison her within

the fjord. It is reported that a German explorer once paddled a kayak up this fjord to the great Rinks Glacier, one of the two largest ice-producing glaciers in Greenland. After our ten hour trip in the 39-foot survey boat, we certainly had a healthy respect for that hardy scientist.

While the survey parties had been deposited on their eagles nest-type ledge high on the escarpment above the glacier, we fought it out in our survey boat, darting hither among the bergs that choked every mile of the fjord. Often we made more distance sideways across the fjord than up it. Our survey boat is brand new and is more like a motor yacht than a ship's boat. It has radio, radar, and depth finder, and facilities for plotting hydrography and bathymetry, also bunks for six and a small galley. We sounded

along our track line as we zigzagged through the fjord and actually collected more scientific data than we had intended to, had there been no heavy concentration of ice. These soundings (measurement of depth) will eventually be incorporated on the chart of this area for the benefit of other navigators to follow. Also, a study of the depth of the fjord has an important bearing on the complete study of the glacier.

Although air reconnaissance told me that we could probably make it all right, I think that had there not been a “back way out” so to speak, over into an adjoining fjord that was relatively ice-free, we would not have attempted the passage, because there would be nothing so undesirable as to have the ice jam up and leave us stuck up a lonely fjord, even if we were in a “motor yacht”. As it turned out we had a rather uneventful trip except for dodging bergs and seeing some magnificent scenery.

Unfortunately, the giant glacier, towering 250 feet high and several miles across, did not “calve” for us (this is when large pieces of ice break off from the glacier wall and become icebergs), although the survey party did see the birth of some bergs.

Returning to the ship at about midnight by the long-about way for our boat’s crew and by helo for the survey parties, we not only enjoyed, but thoroughly deserved, the sizzling steaks which had been ordered in advance by radio -- you see, radio is good for something, isn’t it?

CHAPTER SIX

On the 24th of July we were laying to in dense fog off Umanak Island. At the northern tip of this island there is a typical Greenlandic village with houses scattered at various levels on the sloping rocks. However we could not see them until we approached within a couple of hundred yards. Cautiously feeling our way, nudging bergy-bits and growlers aside, we approached until our depth finder jumped up from 100 fathoms to twenty. This being plenty close enough for comfort, the boats went over the side and the first shore party was on its way. Since we did not know what the shore officials would say to suddenly dumping a large crew of men on them without warning, only the heads of the scientific party and some senior crew went ashore on the first trip.



As we left the ship to head into the narrow harbor entrance we saw one small cargo ship and several trawlers, all painted red, moored with two anchors down and a long hawser from the stern ashore, European-style. We were surrounded by rowboats filled with children. The boats were neatly kept and the children rowed like able seamen, but only one boat had life jackets in sight. Our arrival at the dock brought stevedoring operations to a halt and

dozens of Danes and Greenlanders looked curiously at the new arrivals. The local Danish Manager came forward to greet us, speaking excellent English. In a few moments we were exchanging pleasantries in his modern office, complete with office machines, piles of paper to be worked on, and a pretty secretary.



Meeting the Mayor, we left the scientists to talk about icebergs and historical events while the rest of us strolled about the village. Anticipating a desire to buy things, we changed our dollars into kronen at the post office and then went first to investigate a large crowd up on the hill. This, we found, was a sort of communal square outside a tiny but modern supermarket, and was where the local mothers gathered with their toddlers and prams.

Everywhere one looked there were children and dogs. Some of the children had been especially decked out in colorful native costumes, obviously for the benefit of our cameras. A few enterprising kids played in and out of the boats pulled up on the beach or were swinging like tightrope circus walkers on the taut hawsers to the ship. The rest of them just stared out of curiosity.

By this time we had arranged for more of the crew to come ashore and as we looked down (and up) over the village—no two houses were on the same level—there was a liberal sprinkling of white hats, the crew making themselves quite at home.

It was interesting to see popular American brands right alongside cans with labels written in German and Danish, and were it not for this, you would think you were in your neighborhood grocery. That is, until you picked up the local newspaper at the door and tried to read words like “autlmuginik, ulorianartunik, kingunskartortok. Uvdluvtine, napartot “. No wonder our conversation with the natives had to be confined to sign language and smiles.



There were nearly 1000 villagers, a large settlement by Greenlandic standards, and the Mayor (a native Greenlander) told us that he dispensed justice to a thousand more, spread out in tiny villages up and down the fjord. All travel is by boat or ship in the summer, and by dog sled over the sea ice in winter. A supply ship arrives every Monday on a regular schedule, and from the elaborate radios and tape recorders we saw in the one general store, somebody must be making a good living fishing in order to buy them. Umanak has a good hospital with two doctors, one of whom had been there four years and was now going back to Denmark for a month's holiday.

Our main purpose in stopping at Umanak was to obtain local information about the habits of icebergs. Once the Mayor warmed up to our questioning, we found we had certainly come to the right place. He knew every one of the many fjords intimately and



much of how the general trend of the glaciers is one of recession, with ice conditions nowadays nothing compared to the 1900 - 1920 period. I don't think we would have readily believed this a couple of days ago when we came back down Karajaq Ice Fjord, twisting and turning the ship like a taxi driver around the growlers and bergs.

This little cove of Umanak is much like small

harbors in many parts of the world where the entire community life is based on shipping. There is no other way to get there except by boat. The town is built on the side of the mountain and there is hardly enough of a flat spot for a helicopter to land. It is even unusual to find a slope gentle enough amid Greenland's rugged rocks where a settlement could be built. In steaming up and down these fjords we found many miles of sheer cliffs where even a small boat could not land. In putting our scientists ashore to survey the glaciers, we had to depend mainly on the helicopters since at only one spot could we find a place to land a boat.

Always uppermost in our mind was the problem of how to get the survey party out should the aircraft be out of service. Like all good scientific field parties, experienced in mountain climbing, they felt prepared to "walk out" should the need arise, but after seeing Greenland, I think they changed their tune.

We still have several days left of further scientific exploration, but if I am to mail this letter from our next port of call, then I must get it finished and into production in the ship's office.

We are presently steaming in dense fog (is there any other kind –it hardly seems so on this cruise) back around Nugasuaq Peninsula and between Disko Island and the mainland in search of more glaciers to study, along with making oceanographic drops. Then a port visit at Jakobshavn, one of the larger towns in Greenland and adjacent to the great Jakobshavn Glacier, the granddaddy of them all, where the largest icebergs of the Arctic are spawned. This study, together with a port visit at Godhavn at the Arctic Institute will wind up this portion of our summer. On the 6th of August we are due back in Sondrestrom just when the King of Denmark will also be there. This means that EASTWIND will get a quick "soogie" (face washing) and all hands broken out to "Man The Rail" to render naval honors to the Sovereign of our host government. From there, if all is well with the other icebreakers on the team of Arctic 68, then we will head for a week's leave in Scotland.

Don't forget that the US Mail will catch up with us wherever we go, so keep on writing to your crewman. He'd rather hear from you than eat – and you know our "chow" is darn good.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Right now, as I write this, I am looking out over the Canadian mountains of Ellesmere Island. All around us new (next winter's) ice is forming on the water, and the railings around the ship and the radio antennas are clustered with spray from the brisk northwest wind. We have cleaned the pilot house windows for the n^{th} time, and through them we see a beautiful sunset scene which perhaps no other Coast Guardsmen have seen this year. Although this is not the furthest North that EASTWIND has ever gone, we are right now perhaps the furthest north that any Coast Guard ship has gone this year. Our latitude is $80^{\circ} 15'$ North, and we are in the upper reaches of Kane Basin, which separates Greenland from Canada. The ice is patchy and had we reason to work further north we could easily do so.

A few days ago the Operations Officer and I flew in a Navy P 3 reconnaissance plane (the military version of the Lockheed Electra) up from Thule to see what ice conditions our ship would be getting into today. We flew well past our present position and circled Weather Station Alert, on Ellesmere Island, the northernmost habitation of man. It was a beautiful day with visibility over a hundred miles in all directions. And we were sorely tempted to fly on up over the North Pole—just to be able to say we've been there. Of course it is common for aviators to fly over the Pole, but for us surface sailors it would have been a thrill. However, we had no legitimate reason for doing so, and, had anything happened, it would have been difficult to explain away. So we contented ourselves with flying back over the Humboldt Glacier, the largest glacier in Greenland (and in the world), looking for an old B-29 that had been wrecked there many years ago. Being a light plane buff, I was particularly thrilled when the pilot let me fly the plane for an hour or two, up one valley and down another alongside the glacier. It was surprising how similar it is to flying a little Cessna. The principles are all the same—you just have to work a little harder at it.

To “flash back” as in the movies, our last letter told you about our glacier studies in late July and August. Perhaps some of you, who do not have a crew member to fill you in on current happenings, are wondering why it has been so long between letters and what we have been up to in the meantime. Well, one day in early August our divers went over the side in the harbor of Jakobshavn for a routine qualification dive. We mentioned rather casually, “Why don't you take a look at our propellers while you are down there.” That did it! We did not like what they found but it was certainly a good thing that they found it though. We would probably have had a broken shaft and lost a \$ 50,000 propeller within the next day of operation. The divers found that the heavy bearing that supports the outer end of the starboard propeller shaft had worked loose, sheared off 14 massive retaining bolts and had almost completely worked out of the strut. At the time that we received this unhappy news we were anchored in a tiny harbor, not 500 feet from shore and completely surrounded by icebergs while a survey party was working on a nearby glacier. The Chief Engineer mandated “not one more turn of that shaft.” Now twin screw ships are not ladies when they have to maneuver on only one screw. It takes a lot to get them to behave and go where you want them to. For example, if we turned to the right without the starboard wheel operating, our turning circle would only be 400

yards, but to try to turn left, it would be over a thousand yards. The icebergs were drifting in a strong current and might well close the harbor entrance, so without further delay we got underway on the port propeller and with the help of the ship's boats got turned around and back out to sea.

To make a long story short, we never did get our R&R in Scotland, were ordered back to Boston for dry-docking, spent almost a month on repairs, and then hustled back up north to resume our responsibilities.

Leaving Boston of the 8th of September, we headed towards the cold country—and colder it would be at this time of year. Stopping at Sondrestrom Fjord we removed the radio beacon equipment for the winter. We had a beautiful clear day, and taking out the beacon by helo we gave it to the US Naval Ship REDBUD to take back to New York. I was some surprised to see the REDBUD up here since during WW II she was then a Coast Guard ship and I was her skipper for an interesting year which included the atomic bomb test at Bikini.

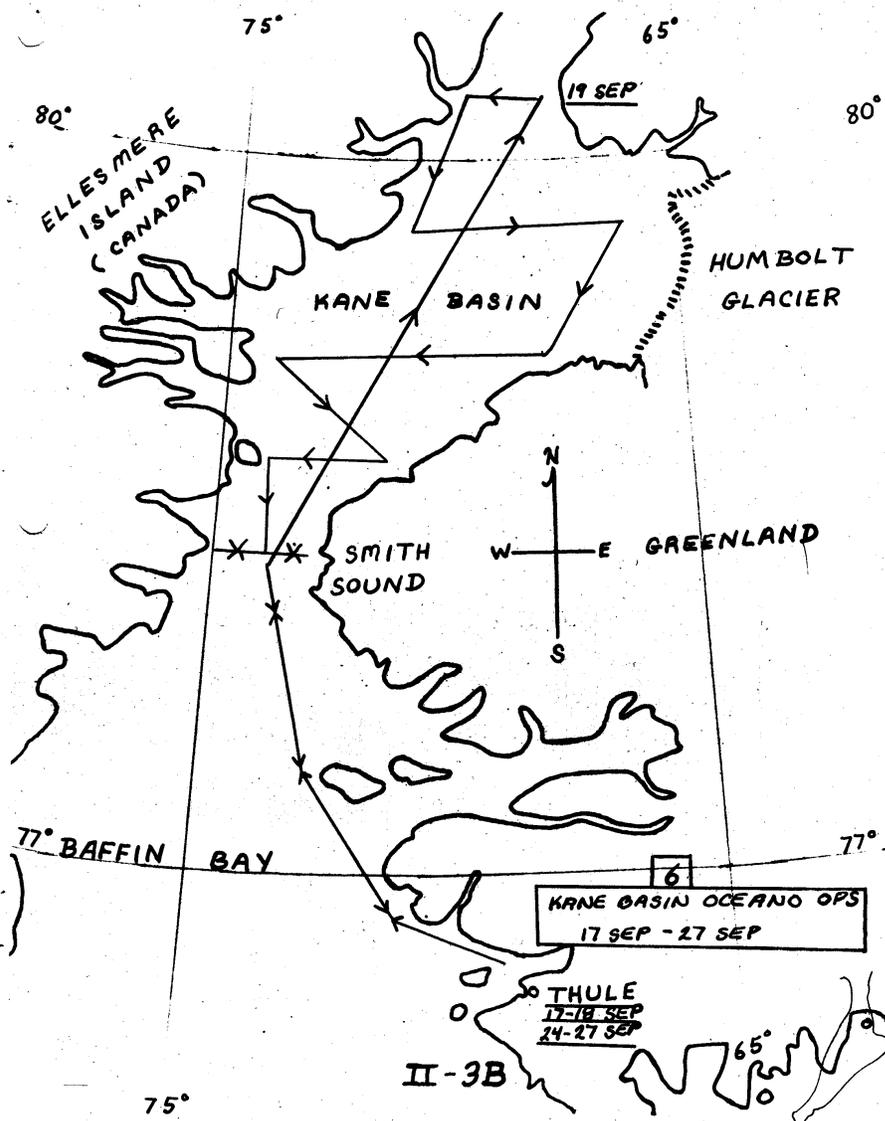
Leaving Sondrestrom we headed for our by-now-familiar haunts in Northern Greenland, i.e. Thule Air Base. To us it was almost like coming home to revisit a place way up here where we were known and had had such a pleasant reception each time we visited before.

Our first mission of this part of our second Arctic '68 cruise is to take samples of the sea water at various depths in certain prescribed locations. This is called "Taking Nansen Casts", named after the oceanographer who developed the method. We are able to measure the salinity, oxygen content and temperature to the third decimal place of sea water at various levels. From this data collected in thousands of observations scientists are able to come up with much useful information about the Arctic Ocean and surrounding seas. We have four specialists from the Oceanographic Office plus certain trained crewmen who assist them in taking the observations. While the rest of us are warm and comfortable inside the ship watching movies, these hardy men are out on a tiny platform on the stern, freezing themselves for sometimes several hours on end, lowering a series of special inverted bottles on a long wire, deep into the sea. When at the prescribed depth a weight is dropped along the wire which trips the top bottle to capsize and fill with water, thus obtaining a sample. The first bottle in capsizing trips another weight to slide down the wire, again obtaining a sample at the second depth, etc., etc. until all have been done. The bottles are then hoisted aboard, taken into the laboratory to be analyzed. While this being done, the ship has been steaming over to the next location, and it's time to do it all over again.

Meanwhile, the navigation team on the bridge has been carefully plotting our position. In the Kane Basin where we are at the moment, we have found that plotting ourselves in by radar (the only means up here) we find that the respective coasts of Greenland and Canada do not agree with each other as charted, but are four or more miles different. Small wonder though in such a remote location, and considering how they were first charted by hardy explorers in wooden ships and primitive facilities.

Our gyro compass gives us fits of unreliability. Operating in high latitudes it develops irregularities, and frequent errors. We take bearings of both sun and moon whenever

possible. Due to being nearly as far north in latitude as the North Magnetic Pole, our ship's magnetic compass now is pointing true west while indicating magnetic north. This is just another headache to the Navigator who takes it all in stride.



We are not far from Hall Basin where we were supposed to have gone earlier this summer had we not had the propeller casualty. Again, we are tempted to run 90 miles north and go investigate for ourselves, but there is too much chance of a sudden change of wind blowing the ice pack down (really up) on us and besetting us for the winter. It is a nice day today but in the Arctic tomorrow could be a totally different story. So--since our Polaris-Hall mission was called off (Polaris was the name of Hall's ship) and we don't have the pathologist aboard anyway, we could hardly justify risking the ship up there at

this time of year. Actually we are two to three weeks behind basic schedule. A week or ten days in the Arctic is important in dealing with the fall freeze-up.

So, reluctantly in a few minutes when we have taken our third station in 80-30 N, the order will be given to steer South and we will be officially heading towards home—in that direction that is, but there is still much for us to do. When we finish the Kane Basin study, we go back to Thule and pick up another group of scientists on the 1st of October to commence a zigzag track down Baffin Bay and Davis Strait, taking observations which will aid the Navy in determining ice conditions for the following

navigation season. A short run up the East Coast of Greenland and then--it will really be homeward bound in fact. On the way south we plan to pay a courtesy call at Godhaab, the capital of Greenland in mid-October. This will be even more interesting than our visits last summer to the small Greenlandic villages of Umanak and Jakobshavn since Godhaab is a larger town, almost a city. Also, if we should finish our present task early, perhaps there will be a sack of Danish mail that needs to be delivered to Kanak or New Thule. This is where the native Greenlanders were moved when the Air Force Base was built at Thule on their land.

Right now, after two days operating in Kane Basin, we are completely surrounded by icebergs that have calved from the mighty Humboldt Glacier. This glacier, although the largest in the world, is not as high as some that we visited earlier in the season. Thus the bergs are not as large as many that we have seen, but with a glacier with a front of 48 miles, Humboldt certainly puts out an awful lot of ice, and we are right in the middle of it with real darkness coming on.. I hope our bow headlights will work well tonight. Last summer we had daylight all night. Now the sun sets earlier in the day and it is hard to see our way through the ice. For the past two days we have been running back and forth the 65 miles across Kane Basin, taking observations every 10 miles or so. We are now running all six main engines and making reasonable headway, six knots, that is. I am hoping that we will be in clearer water by sunset. You can see the water re-freezing more and more each day. I would not like to be up here next week at this time--we might have to begin thinking more seriously about our stock of wintering-in rations.

Because of our schedule for October, the last outgoing mail must leave the ship on the first of the month so, regretfully this will be the Last "Dear Friends" letter which I shall write from EASTWIND this year. It has been a real pleasure to share with you our experiences in the summer of 1968. This has been a wonderful cruise (despite our casualty to the starboard propeller) with a fine, a very fine, bunch of men. They have supported me and their ship with a most excellent performance of duty and I am proud to call them "Shipmate".

Very Sincerely Yours,

C. William Bailey

POSTSCRIPT

There is said to be more truth in Murphy's Law than one might think when it comes to planning events dealing with a ship. In the case of the Cutter EASTWIND let me bring you up to date regarding the conclusion of Arctic 1968.

We got safely out of Kane Basin before winter set in, but on our way back to Thule we received orders to proceed immediately to an Eskimo village and remove a group of sick children to be brought to the hospital at Thule. The first real winter storm hit shortly before we reached Thule and we had to moor in a sixty knot gale of blinding snow – what they call Phase One weather. How thankful I was that I had not acquiesced to the Navy's request that we stay and finish the season on one propeller, but had urged an immediate repair.

After the children had disembarked, we replenished, picked up our mail and decided that the best place for EASTWIND was to rapidly be on her way South. We still had a mission to accomplish in Baffin Bay. But a couple of days out of Thule there was a message notifying of a cable break about half way down the Greenland west coast. No other breakers were available so good old EASTWIND was soon on her way to assist. This time it was a Canadian cable ship surrounded by bergs. By the time we arrived they were getting ready to work on making the final splice, so they said to “just stand by and keep a sharp eye on the bergs for us.” There was one gigantic table berg that had a suspicious track--right down the throat of the cable ship. We estimated a collision in six hours according to its drift. Urging the cable ship to speed up her splicing, we watched the berg like a hawk. Before long the ship was bleating over the radio “Can't you push it away. We can't finish the splice in time.”

Well, EASTWIND only has 10,000 Horsepower with all her engines going. This berg was easily a million tons displacement. We were not at all eager to have a close relationship, but as the situation continued to deteriorate and the radio continued to squawk, we sent a boat to sound out around the berg to make sure there were no underwater spurs or shelves of ice that could raise up under the ship, and so we gently pushed at first and saw no visible changes, then we pushed at full speed for a couple of hours. The Canadians swore that we had moved the berg, but we doubted it. Well, at least it encouraged them to do a speedy splice. The job was completed and we got out of there to go on about our business.

The rest of our trip was routine. Deciding to forgo the port calls put us back in Boston almost on schedule early in November. However, Murphy's Law wasn't through with us yet. We were greeted by the news that EASTWIND was to be decommissioned so we decided to take the profit from the ship's store and throw a bang-up ship's family party with suckling pig and its apple. AND A GOOD TIME WAS HAD BY ALL.

EPILOGUE

EASTWIND was a venerable and much beloved home afloat to more than two thousand officers and men over her twenty-four years of arduous service in the top and bottom of the world. Many of these crew members gather regularly in a Reunion every two years to exchange remembrances of their duty which contributed to her envious record as an outstanding Cutter of the United States Coast Guard,

EASTWIND accomplished a number of FIRSTS for the famous Wind Class Icebreaker over her lifetime. She was:

FIRST to circumnavigate the world .

FIRST to navigate the St. Lawrence Seaway, and Lakes Ontario and Erie.

FIRST to reach the farthest north.*

FIRST to sight the tallest iceberg.*

FIRST in the hearts of her crews.

Like all Ships and Sailors that "Go Down To The Sea", EASTWIND is gone now, but in our hearts and minds she will always be FIRST.

** Other Wind-Class Ships exceeded the record in later years.*