

Chapter Five

Arriving at the Bay of Whales

Communications became more difficult as we moved closer into the Antarctic Circle. I can recall, the day after we had arrived at Little America, we were listening to President Roosevelt give an address on the war situation in Europe. On September of 1939, the war had begun in Europe, but the United States had not yet become involved.

We were listening intently as the President was assuring the American public that, even though war was raging in Europe, we would not get involved. Suddenly, a swishing sound came over the short wave radio and our communication lines were severed. Changing frequencies did not alleviate the problem. For several hours we were without communications. We were experiencing something new which had not occurred before; it happened again several times later during the course of the expedition. For the first time, we realized the hazard of being without communications and to be cut off from the rest of the world.

In the meantime, the *Bear* approached and sailed through places where the ice was 2 feet to 4 feet above the water. It flattened out for about 1/2 mile, then there were more heights of ice. The wind is responsible for creating and stacking snow drifts that form the mounds. Little America was founded on one of these long thick pieces of flat ice, four miles long. The ice shelf is called the Ross Ice Shelf. Even though this flat surface was high up out of the water, it was anchored below to great depths. As we came into sight of this display by "Mom" Nature, we were overwhelmed. The best way to describe it is to envision a highrise building in the midst of blue waters.

As we entered the Ross Sea, we met an ice pack some 200 miles prior to our arrival at Little America and our destination — the Bay of Whales. This grouping of ice floats were not too frightening, as they appeared to be relatively small floating chunks of ice. The weather was warm and winds caused the ice to flow freely and break up eventually. The *Bear* was to be used as an ice pack breaker. It seemed strange to us as we had never seen such a phenomenon. That is, those of us who had not been to Antarctica before this trip. It was an awesome sight. We had been sailing on clear, blue waters, and — all of a sudden, we were faced with an ice pack. We hit one stretch where the pack was 30 to 40 miles wide. The ship's power was allowed to a lower speed and proceeded cautiously through this concentrated pack. The crew was thankful that it presented no menace to the ship.

On January 14, 1940, the ship sailed into the Bay of Whales alongside a flat section of the ice shelf (about 4 feet high). Captain Cruzen felt that it was a good place to dock so we put out our lines. Then, holes were dug into the ice to put out anchors (deadmen, as they are known in the Navy) to which the lines were tied — and prayed they would hold. We were soon

descending the gangway onto the flat surface of the ice shelf. As I did so, I could not help but compare this flat uninhabited cold land to the flat hot Gulf Coast of North America from thence I had come.

It was imperative to keep constant watch on the ice beyond the place where the anchors were buried, as the ice was "thin" in places and the blowing winds caused erosion of the ice and caused it to shift. Our first attempt to dock proved so, and the ship had to be moved — it was to be moored at a new location. I am relying on my memory and it seems to me that we went through this procedure three or four times.

While this maneuvering of the ship was happening, we noticed that penguins had stepped up to investigate the new occupants. They were shy at first. It was amusing to watch them ride chunks of floating ice, hop from one to another — bobbing and weaving — then jump into the water and swim for the ice shelf for a closer look.

The weather at this landing was cold, but not unbearable at 10° to 20° above zero. With no wind blowing, it seemed considerably warmer than expected. Actually, we did not have time to worry too much about the cold. It was important to use the daylight wisely to unload some items, working 12-hour shifts. The *North Star* preceded us, stopping briefly at the Bay of Whales before sailing eastward. After investigating conditions at Kaiman Bay and Okuma Bay, Admiral Byrd and Dr. Siple decided to establish the West Base at the Bay of Whales. While *Star* was at the Bay of Whales, it lay anchor in the same vicinity as the *Bear*.

The day had arrived to unload the *North Star*. (See photo page 32.) The snow cruiser required much manpower to prepare for unloading. The logs I referred to in the "Supplies Chapter" was unloaded and a ramp was formed from the ship to the ice shelf. The logs were laid side-by-side and were secured tightly for stability; then, the snow cruiser was jockeyed down the ramp to the ice shelf. It was necessary to keep this expedition in the news back home, as Byrd wanted to create an interest for public support. He was thinking in terms of the project needing extra funding. Therefore, lots of publicity was given to the press, along with photos taken by the expedition personnel.

When it was time to unload the cruiser, Admiral Byrd climbed on top of the machine and stood up while he rode it down the ramp. The cameras were clicking and bulbs were flashing to capture this momentous event. Just as the cruiser was over the edge of the ship, beginning its descent, two or three of the logs snapped. The snow cruiser momentarily dipped and began to slide down the rest of the way. Fortunately, Dr. Poulter, who was controlling the cruiser from within, applied full power and propelled it down in a rush, which allowed it to arrive safely on the ice shelf. This action almost propelled Admiral Byrd from his standing position. He admitted later that he did have a close call.

The snow cruiser did not perform any great tasks as was expected. It stayed stationary for a long time, as it was soon learned that in theory it worked; but in design it was an albatross, for the design prevented it from performing. It was assumed to have a cruising range of 5000 miles and designed to cross crevasses up to 15 feet wide. It was supposed to carry the Beechcraft airplane on its back. It was never given the chance to prove itself. If it had worked as intended it might have been possible for it to reach the South Pole, especially if a route could have been through the southeast by which the Queen Maud Mountains might have been bypassed or surmounted. The weight of the cruiser caused the snow surface to collapse a depth of three feet beneath the machine. Its electric motors were not powerful enough to push it forward. If there had been facilities to change the gear ratio at the West Base, the situation might have been remedied by reducing the speed and increasing the power. After a week's work, the snow cruiser was only half way up the slope from the bay ice to the top of the ice shelf. Finally, after prolonged effort, the snow cruiser was beached at the West Base where it was enclosed in a shelter made of snow blocks and roofed over with canvas. By this time it was converted into a base communications unit, as it was well equipped with radio gear. Dr. Alton Wade, geologist and senior scientist of the expedition, was in charge of the cruiser and the three men assigned to it.

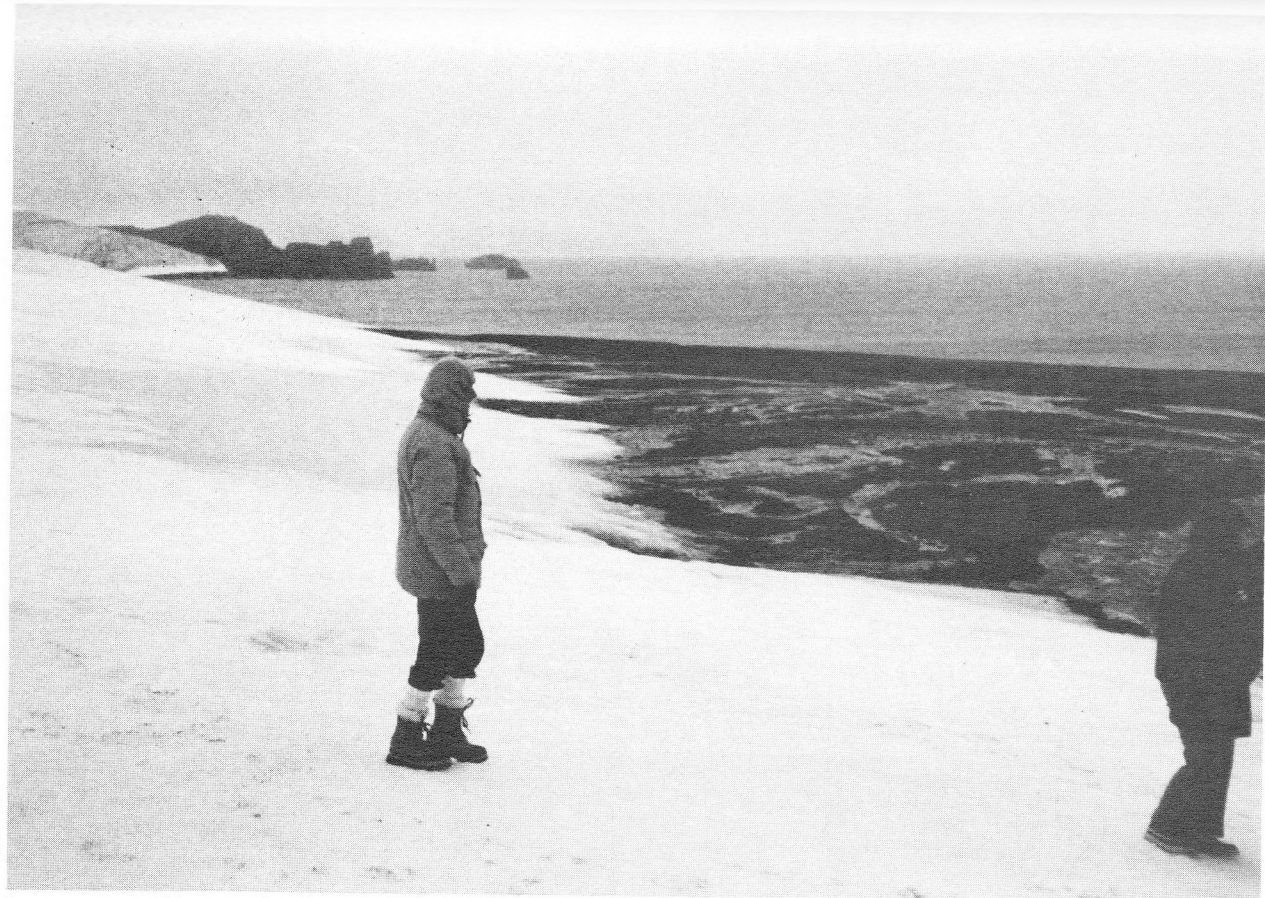
After necessary supplies were unloaded at the West Base, on January 19, five days after arrival at the Bay of Whales, Admiral Byrd, Captain Cruzen and ten members of the expedition that would comprise the East Base, boarded the *Bear* and headed toward Cape Cobeck. The Admiral was interested in getting as many flights as possible into the inland, for much of it had not been reached by dog sledging. As we sailed on, the ice condition was favorable and the *Bear* had little difficulty. On one of his previous trips, he had sailed quite far south, but he wanted to go further this trip, and hopefully launch the airplane in order to take aerial photos that would help to survey any changes that had occurred since his last trip (May 1935). It was a most important factor to plot explorations inland as well as locate any dangerous crevasses. We were still quite far from the South Pole.

On January 21, the Barkley-Grow seaplane took off on a test flight to calibrate radio direction finder.

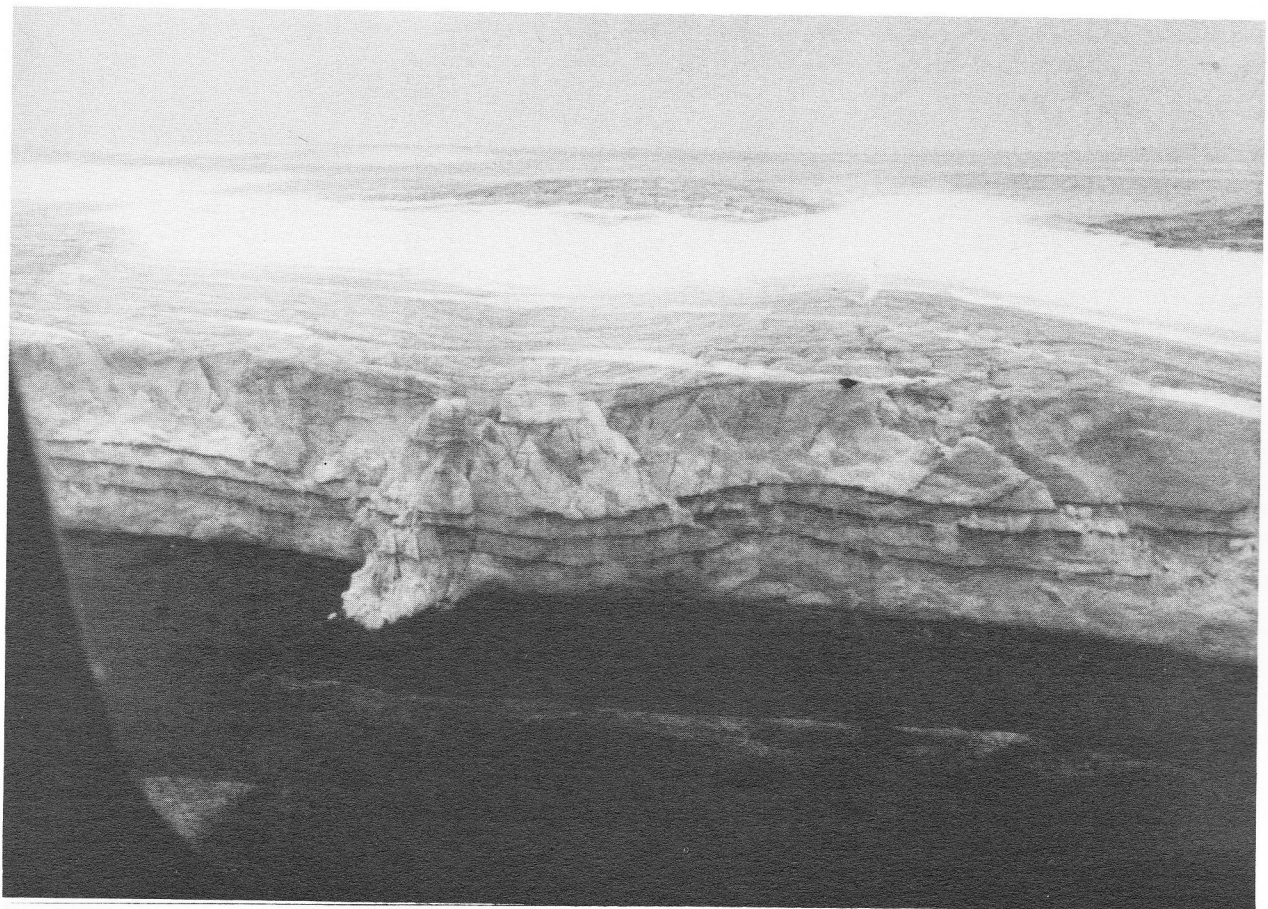
On January 22, the first of four major flights was begun from the *Bear* by Admiral Byrd, Ashley Snow and Earl Perce (pilot and co-pilot). They flew for four and a half hours over the shores of Sulzberger Bay, over peaks of Marie Byrd Land. These flights were important to the members of the expedition as it provided the scientific personnel with idea of field-of-depth in miles that Byrd wanted to reach. The flights provided information that would allow exploring parties to rendezvous at a given parallel with latitudinal and longitudinal correctness, as well as their locations between East and West Bases. Atmospheric conditions hampered observations after



Surveying the desolate and barren region of Antarctica.



It was soundless. Only the voices of the members could be heard.



(Aerial) An apron of floating glacier ice surrounds the continent. These are known as continental glaciers.



(Aerial) Some of the rocks and dirt that a glacier picks up in travelling are carried for some distance and are deposited to form a ridge called marginal moraine.



Unloading the *North Star* at Bay of Whales. Snow Cruiser can be seen on deck.



(l to r) Captain Richard H. Cruzen, Captain Quackenbach, Jr., Rear Admiral Richard E. Byrd, Captain Charles A. Bond and Captain George J. Dufek. Cruzen had not been promoted to Rear Admiral when photo was taken.

a period into the flight. A large expansion of water was sighted along with a visible path, which would enable the *Bear* freedom to maneuver to it.

On January 23, the *Bear* moved northeastward to about $76^{\circ} 39' S$, 154° . At this point, the same members took off again in the seaplane in a four and a half hour flight that took them over Ruppert Coast, Ford Mountain Ranges. Clouds were beginning to collect and as the plane banked counter-clockwise, it emerged from a cloud bank in time to avoid a collision with a mountain peak. From this reconnaissance, another open channel of water was observed which allowed the *Bear* to advance still further along the coastline. So far, communications between ship and plane were good.

Bad weather prevented further flying until the 25th of January, but the *Bear* was slowly proceeding to the open water. Soon, advancing, strong gales of wind attacked the old polar ship and it had to be moored. At this point, the location was $74^{\circ} 43' S$, $143^{\circ} 52'30'' W$, which was the farthest east and south any ship had been.

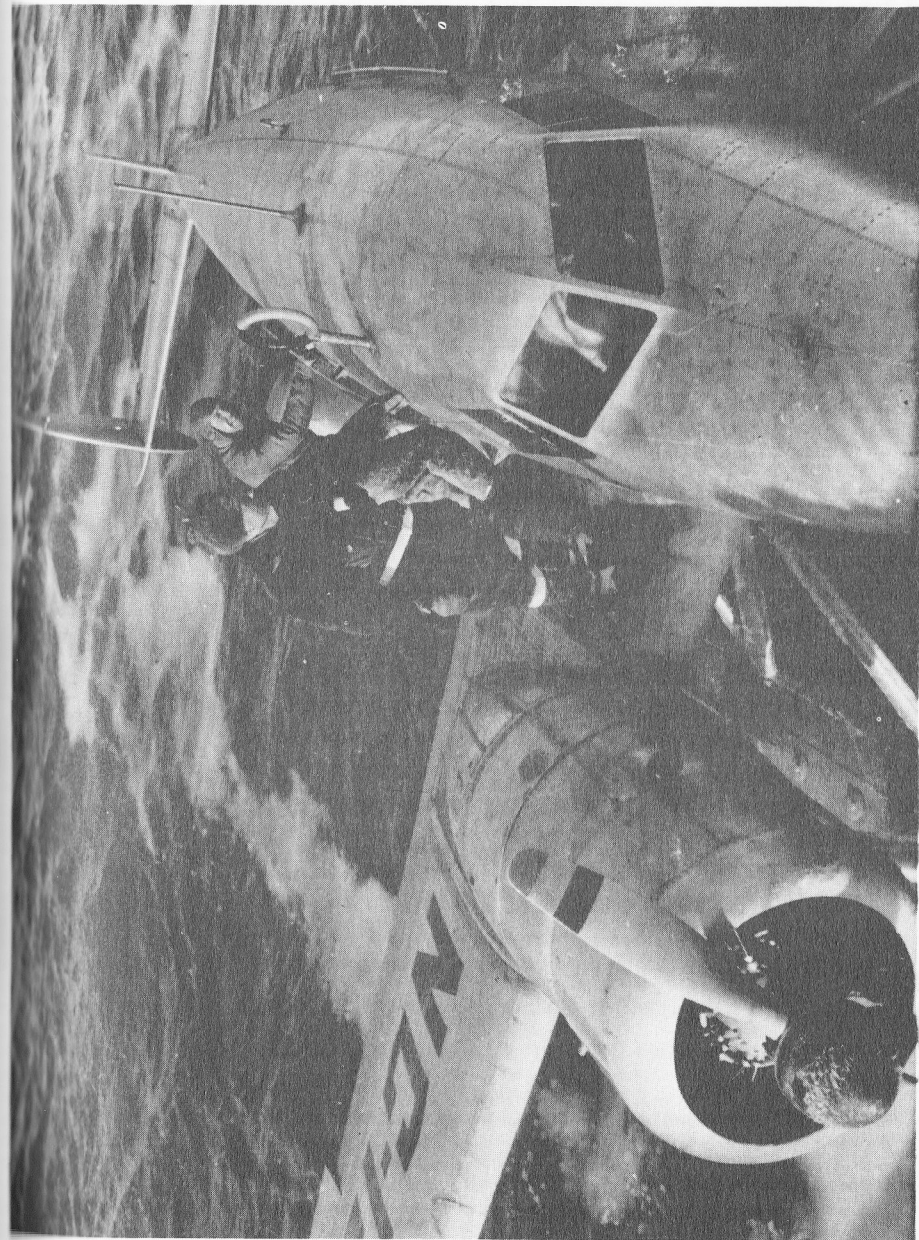
On January 25, another flight was launched, but to no avail, as visibility was poor and hampered discoveries and flight patterns.

On January 26th, the same route as flown the previous day was taken again and it was possible to fly over the Hobbs Coast and witness huge glaciers between 4000 foot mountains; Mt. Berlin and Mt. Moulton of the Flood Range. On the return flight, a snow-covered island which rose 300 ft. out of the water was discovered. Since it had not been previously charted, it was duly named Cruzen Island in honor of the *Bear's* captain.

By this time, much had been seen and discovered. Mountain ranges were discovered that were not known to exist. Volcanic lakes were easily spotted from the air, and territory was scaled and plotted for mapping and topographic purposes. The new discoveries were named and duly noted for plotting future maps. By this time Byrd decided it was time to return to the West Base.

The President, in his letter of provisions, had requested that the area in the vicinity of the south magnetic pole be investigated, but that could not be accomplished on this particular mission or did not materialize at all on this expedition.

On January 28, two flights were launched in order to guide the *Bear* safely into the open waters of the Ross Sea. It was becoming a serious situation, as the ice pack was becoming a menace to the ship and we had to back into a patch of open water. It was at this point that one of the two flights was launched in order to find an open path for the ship. One such path was sighted and this information was radioed back to the ship. As the ship was guided to the new location and the plane loaded, we proceeded on our way, but again found ourselves in a precarious position as the opening path was closing in with huge ice floes. The plane was launched again for



Admiral Byrd standing on Barkley-Grow seaplane. He has just returned to the *Bear* from an exploratory flight, January 26, 1940.

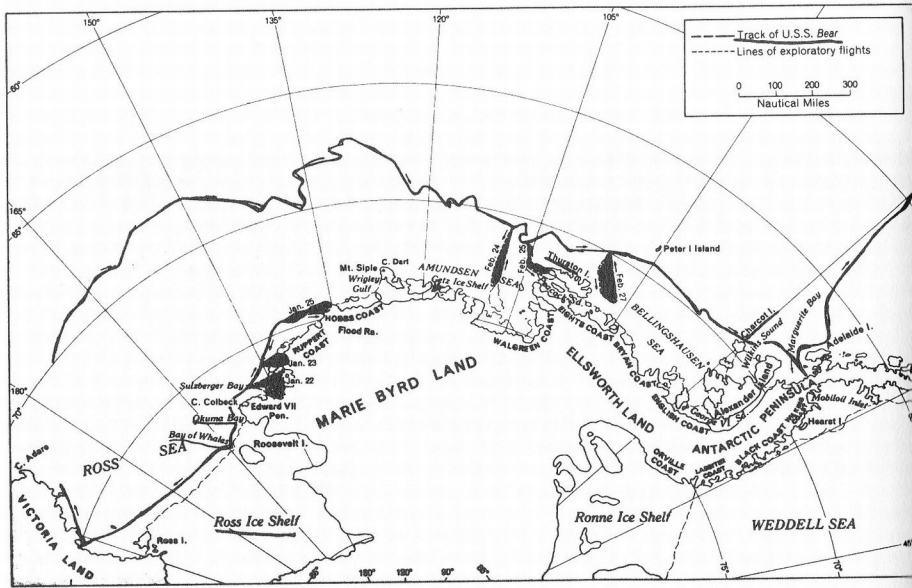
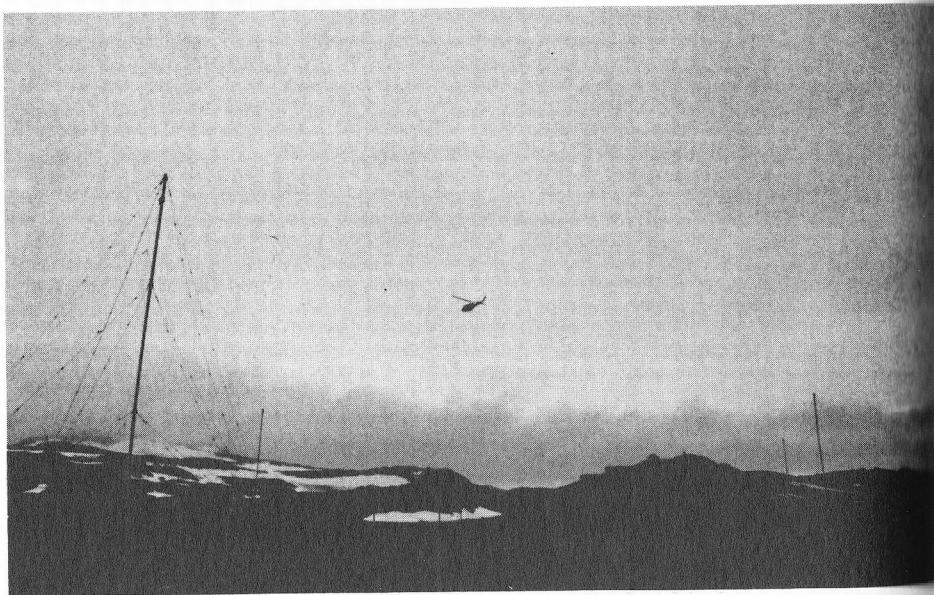


Figure 2.
Track of the *USS Bear* on the Exploratory Cruises of 1940 (Little America)

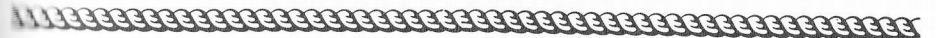


Reconnaissance flights were carried out to find suitable waterways for directing the maneuvers of the *USS Bear*.

further reconnaissance, and again the pilot radioed that he had spotted open water. He gave Captain Cruzen location and direction to maneuver the *Bear*, and the ship sped full steam to the open area. At this point, we were north of Edward VII peninsula. We were being faced with a serious fact that could be devastating for the ship as well as jeopardizing the lives of the ship's personnel. We were low on airplane fuel as some was offloaded at the West Base earlier. We had just enough fuel to launch one more flight. As the plane was being launched, the Admiral was making plans to contact the *North Star*, as a last alternative, to come to our rescue before the situation became impossible.

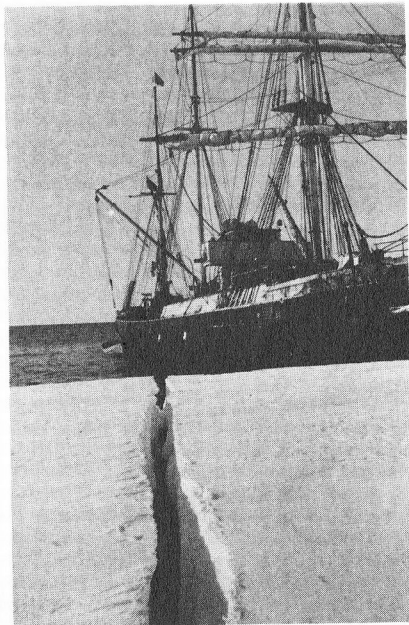
The whole expedition was planned around the existing weather conditions. That is why it was so important to keep schedules as preplanned and to make required rendezvous on schedule. The plane, again, radioed a new position and we went through the same procedures as before, then we steamed to the open waters. It worked out to be an unobstructed path and we arrived into the open waters of the Ross Sea without further incident. It was as if the "Red Sea" had parted for us. On January 30, we returned to the Bay of Whales, having added 300 miles of new coastline to the map of Antarctica. Upon arriving at the West Base, we unloaded the rest of the provisions and began making plans to continue on our way toward the East Base. Up to this time in our journey, the East Base maneuver had not been plotted.

One of my favorite pastimes, while in port at the West Base, was to observe the wildlife. It was fascinating to see the whales blow spouts of water or chase penguins. Other wildlife to observe were seals, petrels and gulls. The penguins were entertaining to watch, as they executed their sensing ability and dexterity in determining the safety of the ice and height from the water line to the ice shelf above. I have seen whales chase one, and — as it came to the ice shelf — jump out of the water and land on top of the shelf above on its feet, regardless of height. They know instinctively how high to jump. Of course, this little penguin had good reason to jump and land safely; it was being pursued by the whales and its life depended on it. The seals came on shore, and in some instances were brave enough to come up to us, roll over and have us rub their bellies. We accommodated them. The variety of seals that inhabit Antarctica are elephant, Weddell, and leopard. A few whales found it entertaining to swim around the *Bear*, out of curiosity, trying to determine whether or not we were one of them.





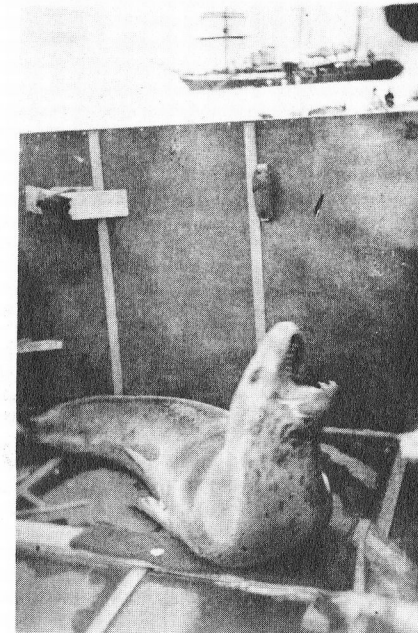
Petrels build their nests ashore on the rocks.



After leaving the West Base, the *Bear* was tied up to the ice shelf. A crevasse developed, extending a long distance. It was the beginning of an iceberg, as a part of it floated out to sea.



The seals came on shore, and in some instances were brave enough to come up to us, roll over and have us rub their bellies. (West Base, 1940).



The variety of seals that inhabit Antarctica are elephant, Weddell, and leopard, as seen in the above photograph.



Adélie Penguin Rookery on Antarctica.



J. A. Daigle aboard the *USS Bear*, and at this stage, almost frozen. *North Star* in the background at Little America — 1940.



Joseph Austin Daigle in the radio shack aboard the *USS Bear*.

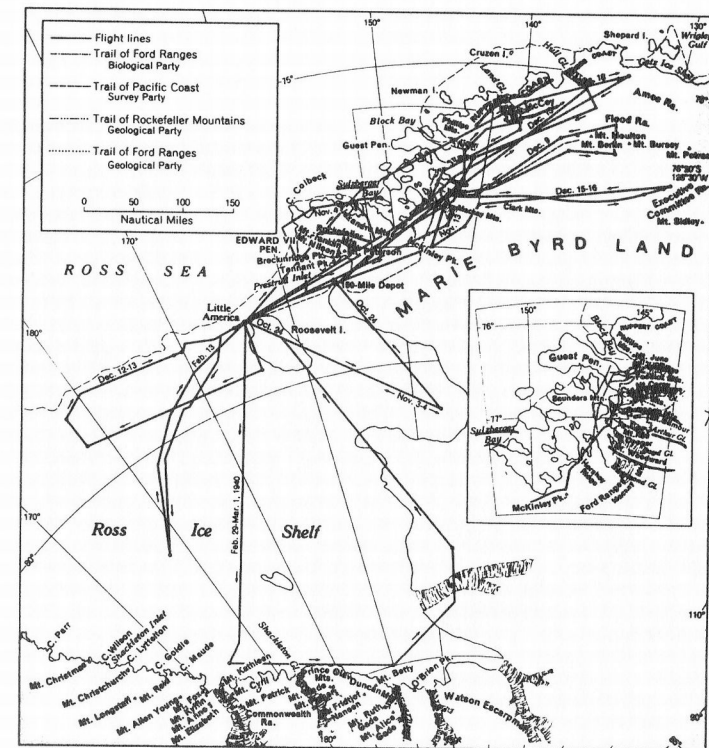


Figure 3.
Map of West Base Operation — 1940.