



*North Star* moored offshore from Stonington Island (1940).



Clockwise: J. Glenn Dyer, Elmer L. Lamplugh, Finn Ronne, Lewis Smith, Richard B. Black, Joseph D. Healy, Lytton C. Musselman and Ashley C. Snow having a staff meeting at the East Base.

## Chapter Six Establish East Base

The *Bear* prepared to set sail for the East Base on February 1, 1940, and proceeded to the west coast of the Ross Sea. Pontoons were removed from the Barkley-Grow seaplane and skis were added to assist the plane to fly up over the high plateaus of Victoria Land from a flat ice shelf surface. An air strip had to be found along the coast. It was difficult to find, as all areas do not have favorable wind conditions; too many crosswinds existed which were hazardous to flying. This meant we must move on.

On February 7, the *Bear* left Victoria Land, charting a northeasterly course and then eastward north of the 70th parallel. Typical to this area, gales and snow buffeted the ship. We eventually arrived at the 70th parallel on February 15.

Four days of inclement conditions prevented the ship from advancing. On the 20th of February, weather had improved and permitted Snow, Perce and Lt. George Dufek to make an one-hour reconnaissance flight. A 75-mile stretch of open water was sighted and, again, the ship moved in that direction. Bad weather moved in once again and delayed further flying until February 24.

On that day, a third attempt to take off was successful and Admiral Byrd, Snow and Perce discovered Walgreen Coast. After flying about 80 miles over nothing but ice, land finally could be seen in the distance, which turned out to be two mountain ranges about 7500 feet high and extended coastwise about 100 miles. This three hour and 15 minute flight, with good visibility, provided excellent conditions for photography and roughly sketching of maps.

As the *Bear* inched its way along in these waters for the next several days, the plane was being launched periodically to discover and plot more coastlines and undiscovered islands. Whenever appropriate, names were given to these new discoveries to honor the various benefactors' and explorers' families. One island was given the name of Roosevelt, in honor of the President.

On February 27, the *Bear* reached the edge of the ice pack, and during a three-hour flight, Thurston Island was discovered. At the end of this cruise, it was estimated that 800 miles of unknown coastline had been added to the map. Since it was on schedule, the *Bear* proceeded eastward to its destination, skirting the edge of the ice pack to establish the East Base.

As we were nearing our destination, a large iceberg field was sighted. Some bergs were as high as a 20-story building. I would venture to say, probably a half-mile or longer in length. One such berg looked like we could have sailed under it as it formed a huge arch at the midsection. Had we tried, we would have been in for a surprise as it was anchored beneath the surface of the water to a great depth. Had the ship ventured through the arch, it would have scraped its bottom on the ice underneath the surface, thereby damaging the vessel and grounding it. As I recall, the Titanic mis-

judged such a berg, which cut a huge hole in the hull and ended with it sinking to the bottom of the ocean. Needless to say, we navigated very carefully through the iceberg field.

Darkness, the menacing pack and shoaling water caused Lt. Cmdr. Cruzen to heave to until the next morning. The *Bear* radiomen had been communicating with the *North Star* radio room, and on the evening of March 4, 1940 the *Bear* reported finding a safe anchorage at Horseshoe Island. The *North Star* was battling fog and snow squalls, but eventually rendezvoused safely with our ship. After battling bad weather and ice floes for several days, a reconnaissance flight was made by Admiral Byrd, Richard Black (who was to be the East Base leader), chief pilot Ashley Snow, and Earl Perce, co-pilot and radioman, which resulted in the discovery of two islands on the north side of Neny Bay. A boat was put into the water and a landing party investigated the site. It was confirmed a suitable place for a base, and subsequently named Stonington Island.

While the *Bear* and its personnel were cruising the water toward the East Base, the West Base personnel were digging in. The *North Star* had unloaded two planes, minus their wing sections, by hoisting over the side of the ship, 500 yards from the unpredictable bay ice onto the Ross Ice Shelf. An aviation cache was established 200 yards from the edge. A "flying fox" (an endless line running from the ship's winch through a block fastened to a "dead man" on the ice shelf) was used to drag the Condor up the slope. The Beechcraft plane had been transported by dog teams and men. A T-20 tractor and Army tank (both used for transportation) were also among first supplies to be unloaded. Then followed other supplies.

The camp site was established about two miles from the ship, which was known as the Eleanor Bolling Bight. Army tents were temporary housing quarters till the prefabricated buildings could be erected. By March 6, 1940, everything at the West Base was securely under roof.

Dr. Paul A. Siple was commandant of the West Base.

Since it was impossible to land the ships near the drifted snow at the East Base, they anchored in deep water about a hundred yards off shore. Boats and a scow, used as lighters, transferred cargo and the other Condor biplane from ship-to-shore. (See photo of unloading on page 46.) The unloading was postponed until March 11 because of strong easterly gales which swept down through the glacial valleys from the plateau-like summit of the Antarctic Peninsula. During these gales, it was necessary for the *USS Bear*, top-heavy with sails and rigging, to seek shelter at Horseshoe Island. The *North Star* remained anchored off Stonington Island and there was always danger during the gales that she might drag her anchors or that a cable might snap.

Subsequently, the supplies and heavy equipment were off-loaded to facilitate erecting buildings for housing. The operation went smoothly here as did the West Base establishment. The *North Star* sailed in and our personnel helped them to unload. Then both ships prepared to sail from

Little America, leaving the crews at both bases to carry on their research and experiments. The *North Star* sailed for Valparaiso, Chile and the North Pacific which was her routine patrol area. The *Bear* headed for Punta Arenas, Chile.

The *Bear* arrived at Cape Horn — and all was well as we proceeded around it. The water was as smooth as glass. The captain had the engine stopped and we hoisted sails to sail around the Horn. The date was April of 1940. It took us approximately two hours, but what a marvelous experience. We could see the tip of Chile as it came into view, and then we headed for Punta Arenas, which is located at the most southern tip of Chile. Keep in mind this is the first shore leave the men of the *Bear* had earned since sailing from Panama in December of 1939. A very long time without shore leave and companionship, other than Navy personnel.



As we were nearing our destination, a large iceberg field was sighted. (On deck of the *USS Bear*.)