



Unloading *North Star*, East Base from ship to Stonington Island on a barge.

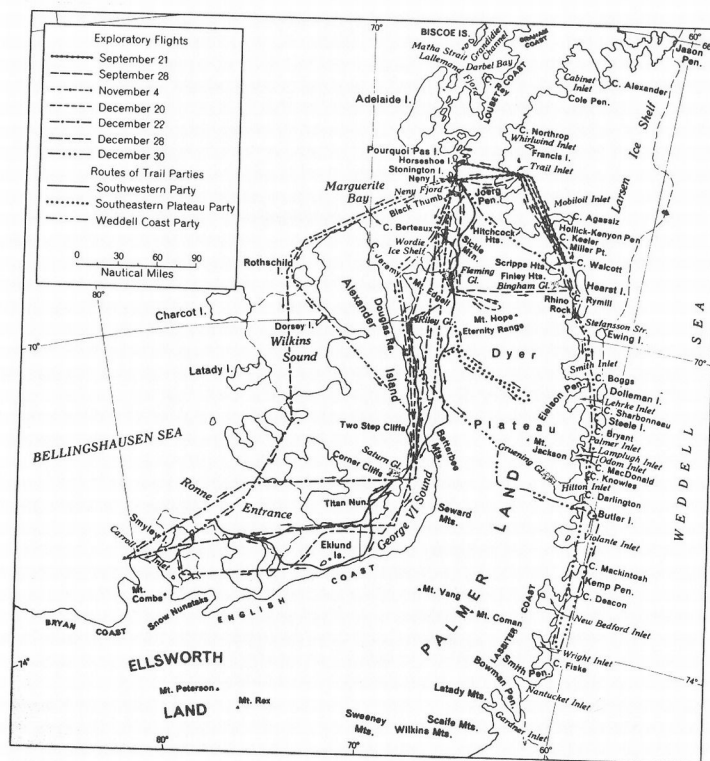


Figure 4.
Map of East Base Operations — 1940.

Chapter Seven Return Trip Home

Our arrival at Punta Arenas was a welcomed one for the crew. The townspeople were there to greet us with open arms. They were aware of this history-making expedition, as the Chilean government, as well as other countries, was interested in the Antarctic region. It was good to set foot on solid ground; to see people and houses; busses and cars; places to eat other than ship food. We were also able to find out what had been happening in the world since our departure from Boston.

The Chileans were very friendly and did all they could to make our stay a pleasant one. Their Navy held a real luau for the crew of the *Bear*. (See photo on next page.) A fire was built in a big hole dug in the ground and the bottom was covered with stones. When the stones were hot, seaweed was piled on top to create a steam and then all kinds of fish were laid on the seaweed. Another layer of seaweed, and another layer of fish, etc. Other foods steamed in the same fashion were corn on the cob, potatoes and fresh vegetables. I remember feeling very humble that the Chilean Navy would receive us in such a manner and we all expressed our gratitude. I spoke a little Spanish which allowed me to get by. After the feast, games were played. We participated in the activities and found that a language barrier was not a hindrance when one occupies a common environment — the Navy. This celebration allowed us all to let off “steam.”

One night, Swede and I had duty aboard ship while we were in port. We were copying code for the next day's newspaper when we heard a terrible clatter on the dock. We looked out and saw one of the electricians, McFarlane by name, coming back to the ship. He was not too steady on his feet and managed to knock over anything in his path. The tide was out and the ship was lower in the water than it was when he had left the ship; this made the gangway lower than usual and it was dipping at a considerable angle between the dock and the ship. “Mac” got to the gangway — looked down at it and decided the safest way to get on ship was to crawl down on his hands and knees. Swede and I were witnessing this display of dexterity with guarded humor and “sympathy.” The next day we really razed him in front of the crew in a good-natured way.

There was not a barber assigned to the *USS Bear*, but shortly after we sailed out of Boston on this expedition, Mac announced he was going to be the ship's barber. He went around the ship reminding everyone it was time for a haircut. As it turned out, he became a pretty good one.

During this stay at Punta Arenas, a sailor named Jake went on shore leave. After being at sea for so many long months, he was ready to let off a lot of steam. He would take a taxi to get around town and soon became known for being a heavy tipper. The local populace immediately got the idea that American sailors were wealthy men. It created a problem for the rest of us as we tipped adequately for services rendered. Needless to say, poor Jake eventually caught heck from the rest of the crewmen for being too “generous.”

After a week at Punta Arenas, supplies were loaded and ship maintenance finished, the *USS Bear* and crew said farewell to the citizens and sailed on up to Puerta Montt, Chile. We were there for a week and nothing of consequence warrants reporting. Then we sailed for the Strait of Magellan. The strait is a passage separating the mainland of South America from Tierra del Fuego Island and connecting the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans. It is 360 miles long and varies in width. South America is a beautiful country — lush and green; tropical in some areas with all sorts of wildlife in remote areas and tons of wild flowers. The lush green is attributed to heavy rainfall. I found sailing through the strait an exhilarating experience. Sailing through this passageway is likened to a funnel with a vacuum.

One night as we were sailing through, we came to a very narrow waterway. Harsh winds began to buffet the ship. It was decided that it was too dangerous to steam through after nightfall, so we dropped anchor. The winds continued to blow only stronger. The ship shuddered and groaned as it was slowly being dragged toward the rocks, in spite of the ship's anchor dug in at great depth. When it became safe to proceed, the engine throttles were at full blast and yet we were only able to inch forward a little at a time. After maneuvering with caution in this manner for a while, the fierce winds abated and we were able to continue on our way.



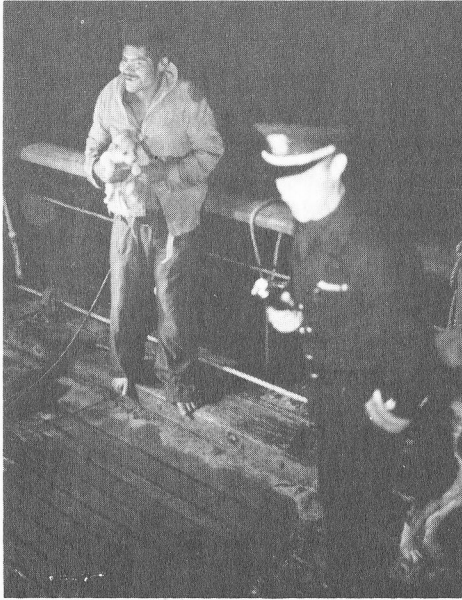
Luau/clambake at Punta Arenas, Chile, given in our honor by the townspeople. (Return trip on the way to Boston after off-loading supplies for bases at Antarctica 1940.)

The second night, we anchored somewhere around midnight. A boat could be heard approaching. The night watch alerted the crew on the bridge. It seemed a rather odd time for a boat to be paddling through these waters. As the small craft approached the *Bear*, a man and a woman with small children and several dogs were visible. We soon found out that the man was signaling to come aboard the ship. He was looking for food and clothing for his family. When we hoisted the man up the Jacobs ladder, we discovered his legs were useless and he was deadweight to hoist. His arms and shoulders were powerful and made up for that weakness. We learned he was an Indian and this was his means of caring for his wife and children. He was onboard for about an hour, then we helped him down into his boat with his "treasures." Being American sailors, we practically filled his boat to overflowing. As a token of appreciation, he gave us a pup from his collection that became the ship's mascot. (See photo on next page.) The next morning we upped anchor and set sail for Buenos Aires, Argentina.

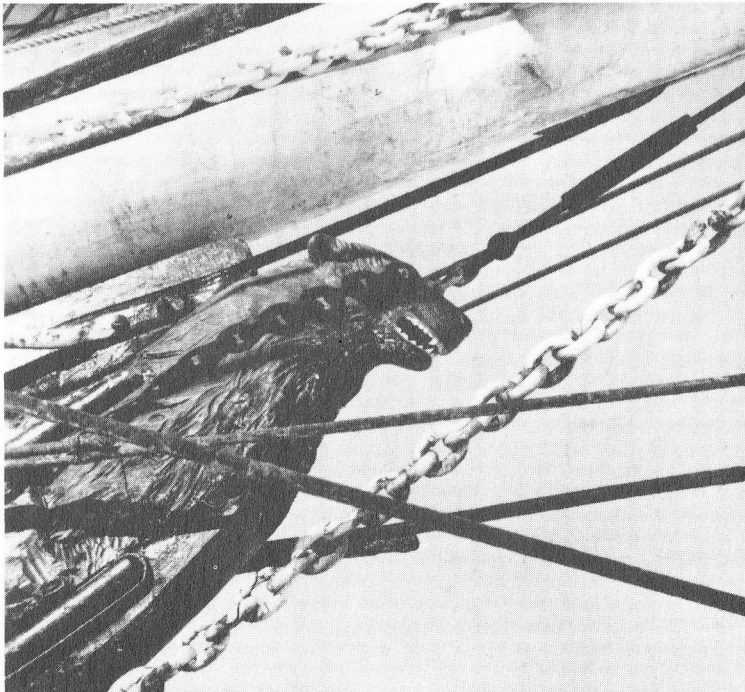
The Argentinian people were not as friendly as the Chileans for they appeared too sophisticated. We were there for about four days to take on more fresh supplies and I cannot remember anything of interest happening at this port.

We then sailed from Buenos Aires to Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. That part of South America was both beautiful and interesting to me. All personnel aboard were happy and enjoyed being in this port. Many visited Sugarloaf Mountain and Corcovado Mountain, where the "Christ of the Andes" statue stands with outstretched arms to guard over the city and its dwellers. The country is predominately Catholic in religion with a smattering of voodoo thrown in. The population is made up of whites, Negroes and a mixture of races called "mestizoes." Also, there are Portuguese settlers; add to that mixture of people the Italians, Germans, Polish, English and even faraway Japanese. Copa Cabana beach is one of the most beautiful beaches in the world. Portuguese is the main language spoken. We had a good stay there; possibly seven days, at the most. Then, from Brazil, we sailed for Philadelphia, USA.

The *Bear* arrived in Philadelphia in July, 1940. She needed repairs badly so she was dispatched to the shipyard. She had to be completely repainted. She was an impressive ship and cut a pretty picture in the water in full sail. The large wooden bear head was carved below the prow, and on this trip it was painted gold. (See photo on next page.) The hull was black with a wide white stripe at the top. Even though the *Bear* was sturdily built, that did not keep her huge timbers from creaking and groaning from the abuse of the sea during rough weather. It was not a comfortable ship to sail on, but it held together with great strength. Another good feature, she did not take on water as was expected during rough seas. A little of the bow was damaged in a storm and that is one of the repairs she received.



We hoisted the Indian man up the Jacob's ladder. As a token of friendship and appreciation, he gave us a pup. Captain Cruzen greeting him as he boarded.



The large wooden bear head was carved below the prow and was painted gold.

There is no ground for the electrical system on a wooden ship as on a metal ship. It is necessary in order for the ship's systems and radio equipment to operate properly. Another bit of damage discovered and repaired was the wide strapping of copper that led from one side of the ship, underneath the vessel, to the other side. We decided it must have been damaged while sailing through the ice packs. Making this repair avoided trouble for the ship on our return trip to Little America as this band was a vital item for our communication systems.

I was particularly glad to be back in the United States, as I had been away from my fiancée, Ruth Elaine Dodge, who resided in Boston, since November 22, 1939. As I was granted a leave, we went to China, Texas, to visit my family; and while there, we were married on July 29, 1940. Ruth is the mother of our five children: Andrew, Betty Anne, Janice, Michael and Joseph Austin, Jr. (Skipper).

Other crew members were also on shore leave. While the ship was in port in Philadelphia, a young sailor by the name of Johnson was about to get into a bit of involvement with a certain young lady. He had just met her, nevertheless was about to get married. Captain Cruzen decided it was his duty to try to stop a disastrous union, so he sent Johnson on a leave to his hometown in San Diego, California. Immediately upon Johnson's return, Cruzen had him restricted to ship for the duration of his stay in port. Soon after the *Bear* sailed, Johnson thanked Captain for preventing him from making the mistake of his life.

Since it was President Roosevelt's intent to keep a permanent base at Little America III, we were expecting to pick up a new crew to relieve those men who were manning the bases in Antarctica; but, due to the fact that a war was raging in Europe, the situation at home was evident we would be involved. He decided to evacuate personnel already there and close down the bases. Orders came through while we were preparing the ship to sail. The *North Star* was also assigned to the same evacuation.

