



ERNEST SHACKLETON

The commander who saved his crew (Antarctica, 1914)

In August 1914, as part of the Imperial Trans-Antarctic Expedition, a ship left Britain under the leadership of the sailor and polar explorer Sir Ernest Shackleton. His intention on reaching Antarctica was to cross the continent on foot, a journey of more than 1,800 miles through the ice-bound wilderness, a truly epic feat which had never before been accomplished.

Shackleton had been to Antarctica twice already, and on his second trip had managed to travel further south than any man before him. Since then, the Norwegian Roald Amundsen had become the first to reach the South Pole, making Shackleton keener than ever to reclaim glory for Britain. Members of the public were just as enthusiastic, and more than five thousand people attempted to join his crew.

Shackleton's ship *Endurance* left London the same day that war on Germany was declared. On board were twenty-eight scientists and sailors, plus the ship's mascot, a tiger-striped cat called Mrs Chippy. They were accompanied by more than sixty dogs, trained to pull the sledges containing supplies when six of the men, handpicked by their leader, would eventually set out across the ice on wooden skis.

Trans—Antarctic expedition means it: (circle one)

- Reaches the Antarctic
- Crosses the Antarctic
- Zig zags across the Antarctic

In the first paragraph which part of a sentence tells you this is a *pioneering* expedition?

Which word tells you the men that would make up the final team were carefully selected?

The voyage south took several months, and it was December before the *Endurance* reached the cold waters around Antarctica. In an area known as the Weddell Sea the crew had to navigate a safe route through great sheets of floating ice that bumped noisily against the ship. These ice floes pose a constant danger in this part of the world, even during what passes for summer in the southern hemisphere.

Great sheets of floating ice bumped noisily against the ship

What other two words does the author use instead of "floating ice"....

Underline the adverb describing the speed of *Endurance*.

The phrase "at the mercy of" means something we are unable to control.

True/false

Progress became agonisingly slow, and very soon the *Endurance* ground to a halt as the ice formed a solid barrier around its wooden hull. At other times the crew found themselves stuck fast in the ice and going nowhere. Eventually land was sighted in the far distance, but with the ice thickening around the ship there was no possibility of reaching it.

Before long the *Endurance* was stuck solid and the men faced the awful realisation that it might be months before the ice melted and freed them to continue their journey. Occasionally a passing iceberg provided temporary shelter from the wind, but as the weather worsened Shackleton began to fear for their safety. A failed attempt to free the ship by using shovels, saws and pickaxes convinced him that it was time to take decisive action.

As the weather worsened Shackleton began to fear for their safety

With the darkness of winter closing in there was no question of abandoning the ship: it provided their only refuge. The dogs were taken off board, however, and housed in makeshift ice shelters called 'dogloos'. This made a bit more room on board for the men, but it offered precious little in the way of comfort. A radio aerial was rigged up, though it quickly became apparent that the ship's location was far too remote either to send or receive messages.

Why was the ship unable to send or receive messages?

This meant the men were now completely cut off from the world. Facing a long, cold wait for the ice to melt, Shackleton worked hard to keep everyone mentally and physically fit. He instituted a programme of exercise for the men and training for the dogs, and even organised the occasional race to keep things interesting. The men put on short plays to entertain themselves, and everyone was encouraged to take walks out on the ice when weather conditions permitted.

Shackleton realized that survival didn't just depend on physical fitness but also on _____.

It was August by the time the ice finally began to melt and release its grip on the ship, a full year since the men had left London. Disaster struck almost immediately, however, when a build-up of ice under the ship caused it to lean perilously to one side. Terrifyingly, with temperatures as low as minus 25°C, massive blocks of ice were now being slammed against the ship by the wind pressure and sea currents.

In the sentence beginning 'Disaster struck almost..'. Find and copy one word for dangerously (clue — it's an adverb).

Write the temperature in numbers.

The danger was obvious and eventually the *Endurance* could take no more. Crushed by the onslaught of the ice, her immense timbers began to bend and crack. One crewmember likened the sound to fireworks or big guns, and as water began to pour into the hull an immediate evacuation was ordered.

As many supplies as could be carried were hastily pulled from the ship, along with three small lifeboats. A temporary camp was established on the ice, and for as long as the ruined ship stayed afloat every effort was made to grab anything else on board that might be useful.

With the ship all but lost, Shackleton knew the expedition had to be abandoned. His patriotic dream of glory now became a desperate fight for survival. The team attempted a march across the ice to safety, but it took them three days to cover fewer than two miles, and eventually they turned back. By the time the *Endurance* finally sank the decision was taken to sit tight and camp out on a large ice floe, in the hope that its gradual drift would take them closer to land.

His patriotic dream of glory now became a desperate fight for survival

What impression do you get about the moments *Endurance* sank? Provide one piece of evidence to support your answer.

How many lifeboats did they save?

Predict how Shackleton might survive this ordeal?

