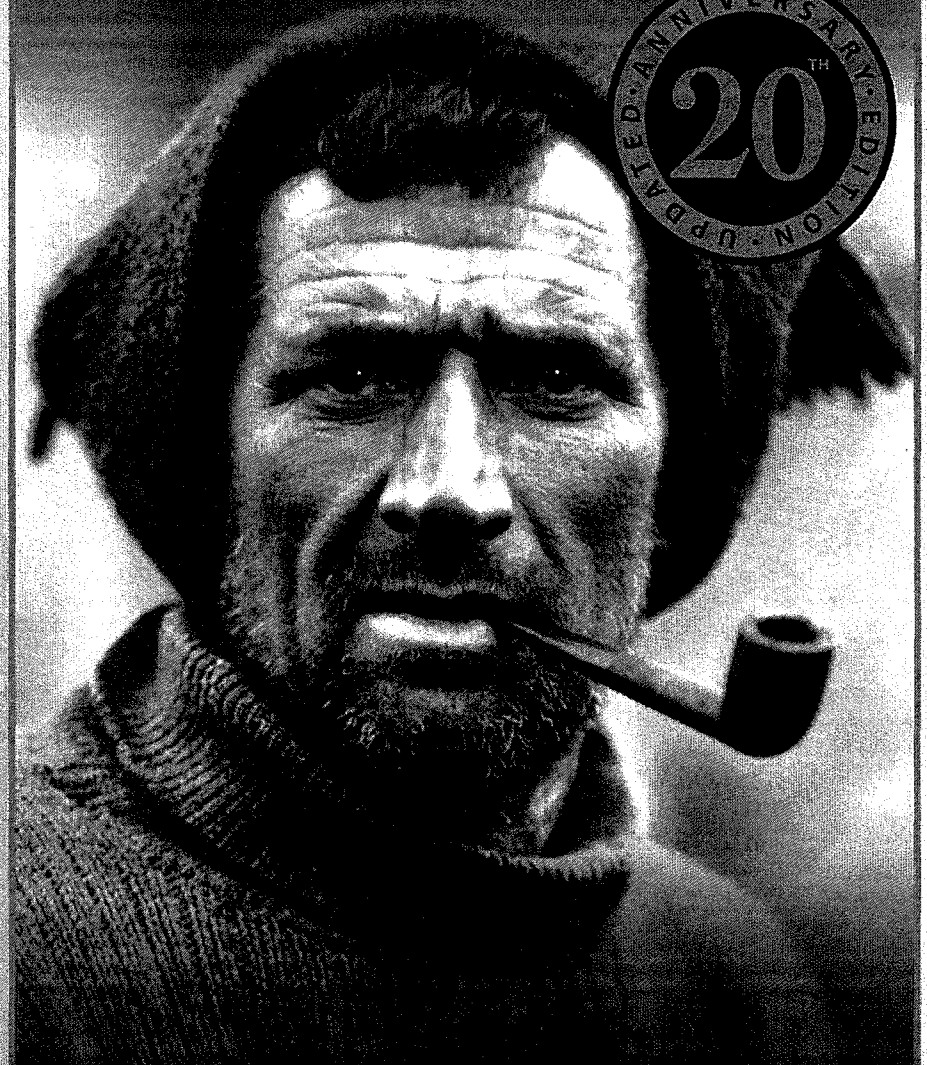


(Smith, M., 2000: 202, 226, 228, 247,
256, 266, 269, 289, 298, 307, 327)

OVER 100,000 COPIES SOLD



AN UNSUNG HERO
TOM CREAN - ANTARCTIC SURVIVOR

Michael Smith

5th

Gill Books
Hume Avenue
Park West
Dublin 12

www.gillbooks.ie

Gill Books is an imprint of M.H. Gill & Co.

© Michael Smith 2000, 2020

First published by The Collins Press in 2000

This paperback edition published by Gill Books in 2020

978 0 7171 8956 4

Proofread by Neil Burkey

Printed by CPI Group (UK) Ltd, Croydon CR0 4YY

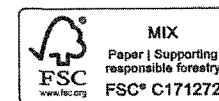
The author and publisher have made every effort to trace all copyright holders, but if any have been inadvertently overlooked, we would be pleased to make the necessary arrangement at the first opportunity.

All rights reserved.

No part of this publication may be copied, reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, without written permission of the publishers.

A CIP catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

5 4



Co

Auth
Ackn
Notes
Prefa

A fac
A ch
Intro
A ho
Intro
Soutl
Soutl
Hop
The
A rac
A tra
Fatal
A gri
A he
The
Trapp
Cast
Lau
A fra
An e
Cros
Beyo
Retu
Life
War
Tom
Men
Endn
Bibli
Index

was a strict agreement designed to give Shackleton full control of the profits from sales of literary and artistic works which, in turn, would help finance the expedition itself. But Crean did not care too much since he did not keep diaries on any of his three expeditions and was not a prolific letter writer.

Shackleton had by now made his final selection of the six-man party for the historic crossing of the Continent. It was to be Shackleton, Wild, Macklin, Hurley, Marston and Tom Crean. In contrast to Scott's secrecy over the final polar party and poorly considered last-minute choices, Shackleton was prepared to name his men before setting out, thus avoiding any disputes and disappointments when the expedition was underway.

Shackleton was a supreme optimist, which he demonstrated by proposing to cover the 1,800 miles (3,000 km) across the largely unknown Continent in only 100 days – a staggering performance for someone who was no expert at driving dogs. Amundsen had taken 99 days to cover much the same distance to and from the South Pole, but Amundsen and his companions were experts and experienced at both skis and dogs.

Wild was to be Shackleton's deputy on the expedition and another *Discovery* veteran, Alf Cheetham, was third officer. P Captain of the ship was Frank Worsley, a tough Anglo-New Zealander widely known as "Skipper", who joined up in strange circumstances. He claimed to have dreamt one night that Burlington Street in central London was blocked with ice and he was navigating a ship along the thoroughfare. Next morning he went along to Burlington Street and found the offices of the Imperial Trans-Antarctic Expedition and he was signed up after meeting Shackleton for only a few minutes.

In another bizarre episode, Shackleton decided to take a young medical student, Leonard Hussey, because "I thought you looked funny". Also on board was Frank Hurley, an adventurous photographer from Australia who had previously been to Antarctica with Mawson. The rest of the *Endurance* team included a crew of officers and hardened seamen, plus a nure of doctors, biologists, geologists and other scientists.

which they would all sail. He also moved Ocean Camp a little way onto firmer, more comfortable snow which also helped make life a little more bearable.

The men filled their time with a mixture of duties like searching for food and maintaining the equipment, or alternatively with games of cards or a browse through the handful of books – like *Encyclopaedia Britannica* – which had been salvaged from *Endurance*. At night the twang of Hussey's banjo – the “mental medicine” – could be heard drifting across the eerie landscape.

In early November, temperatures began to revive which was a mixed blessing. It was warmer but it also meant that the area around Ocean Camp became a slushy, water-logged mess, with men's feet frequently sinking deep into the morass. Everything was wet through.

P There was almost a sense of relief when, on 21 November, *Endurance* finally succumbed to the Antarctic. At around 5 pm, Shackleton suddenly called out, “*She's going, boys*” and everyone scrambled to snatch a final farewell to their ship. She went down, bows first, her stern raised in the air before the ice swallowed the broken vessel.

The loss of *Endurance* was the moment when the 28 finally cut their ties with civilisation. They were, officially, castaways at 68° 38' south, 52° 28' west, adrift in one million square miles of ocean and 1,000 miles (1,600 km) from the nearest human settlement.

It was also the moment when the morale of the men would be severely tested and Shackleton was coming to realise the full value of men like Crean and Wild who, in the face of growing adversity, were becoming the mainstays of the party. Both men gave invaluable support to Shackleton at a time when the spirits of the party were under enormous strain from the loss of the ship and dreadful living conditions on the drifting ice-floe.

Shackleton had already been forced to handle a minor mutiny from the carpenter, Chips McNeish, and there was simmering discontent from others as anxiety over their position

AN UNSUNG HERO

Dudley Docker and the *Stancomb Wills*. McNeish, working with the minimum of tools and equipment, had performed a minor miracle raising the gunwales in the hopes of keeping out the waters of the Southern Ocean, skilfully using nails extracted from the sides of the *Endurance*.

With the work finished, Shackleton began final preparations for departure from the ice floe and on 19 December he recorded in his diary:

“Am thinking of starting off for the west.”⁴

Next day he took three of his most reliable and trusted colleagues – Crean, Wild and Hurley – on a short trip to survey the ice conditions to the immediate west. Taking dogs, the four men travelled for about seven miles and were reasonably encouraged.

Spirits lifted and Shackleton, a great man manager, decided to lift morale further by bringing forward Christmas Day celebrations to 22 December, just before they set out westwards. Large quantities of food would be left behind because it could not be carried. With great enthusiasm the men tucked into their remaining luxuries, scoffing ham, jugged hare, anchovies, baked beans, biscuits, pickles and jam and washing it down with ample mugs of tea and coffee.

The next day, 23 December, the men set off again in a replay of the back-breaking hauling of the boats across the hummocks of conformed ice. The procession was, as before, led

Crean in the *Wills* was ordered to come alongside Shackleton in the *Caird* and after a brief discussion it was decided to take the smaller, lighter cutter closer to land to investigate likely places to land. Shackleton joined Crean on the *Wills* and at around 9 am they spotted a narrow rocky beach at the base of some cliffs which offered the hope of a landing.

The entrance they sought was guarded by a reef of threatening rocks which jutted out from the heavy rolling seas. A narrow channel was spotted which offered some hope of slipping through the protruding rocks and they carefully guided the *Wills* towards the inviting gap. Patiently they waited for the right moment and as the next wave rushed through the channel, the order was given to pull. In an instant, the *Wills* crossed the reef and the following wave carried the small boat to a grinding halt on the rocky, pebble-strewn beach.

Crean, Shackleton and the others in the *Wills* had made the first ever landing on Elephant Island. It was the first time they had felt firm ground beneath their feet since they left South Georgia 497 days earlier. They had spent 170 days adrift on an ice floe and seven days in the open boat.

19

A fragile hold on life

The small pebble beach at Elephant Island provided the 28 men with only a tenuous grip on life. It was little more than 100 ft (30 m) wide and 50 ft (15 m) deep, surrounded on both sides by large rocks and steep cliffs, climbing sharply to over 2,000 ft (600 m) in places. The beach was exposed to the full rage of the Southern Ocean, which battered down incessantly.

Elephant Island is no place to be stranded. It forms part of the chain of South Shetland Islands, which were discovered in 1819 by the English merchant seaman William Smith, who was blown off course while rounding Cape Horn. Smith did not land on the hostile-looking island, which sits at the northeastern end of the chain of islands and rocky outcrops about 600 miles (1,000 km) from the tip of South America. It is 23 miles (37 km) long and about 13 miles (21 km) across at its widest, a remote, uninhabited and unfriendly world. The island is comprised almost entirely of rocks and mountains that rise steeply out of the sea, offering very little shelter or beach.

No one knew they were there and they could not expect a chance meeting with a passing ship. It was not on any known shipping route and any rescue mission for the expedition was improbable. By all known information, the men were thought to be at Vahsel Bay, well over 1,000 miles (1,600 km) away on the Antarctic mainland. Without a radio to make contact with

heavy burden was about to fall. The *Wills* came alongside for the last time and the two crews leaned across, exchanging a few feeble but well-meaning jokes to lift spirits. One crewman from the *Wills* told them to make sure that Crean behaved himself when they reached shore and Worsley recalled:

“As for Crean, they said things that ought to have made him blush; but what would make Crean blush would make a butcher’s dog drop its bone.”⁷

Finally, the men leant across the sides, shook hands for the last time and prepared to get underway. On the shoreline, the castaways were a forlorn sight, though they waved hopefully and made sure that the parting cries of “three hearty cheers” rose above the constant noise of the sea breaking around their feet. Hurley said the men felt confident about the “six proven veterans, seasoned by the salt & experience of the sea”. He estimated that the journey to South Georgia would take fourteen days.

Slowly the *James Caird* began to pull away from Elephant Island, with the men on the beach straining for a final glimpse of the vessel as she rose and fell between the heaving swell. Very soon the tiny boat disappeared from view behind the dark menacing waves.

P I It was a toss up which party faced the greatest ordeal – the 22 castaways stranded on the bleak inhospitable beach at Elephant Island, or the six men preparing to sail across the world’s most dangerous seas in a 22-ft-6-ins (7-m)-long open boat without proper navigating equipment. Worsley remembered:

“This was the beginning of the ordeal by water.”⁸

P I It was shortly after noon on Easter Monday, 24 April 1916, and South Georgia was 800 miles (1,300 km) away. On the same day on the streets of Crean’s homeland, Irish Republicans launched the Easter Rising against British rule.

But, by Worsley's reckoning, they were nearing South Georgia and suddenly their hopes soared at the sight of small birds flying overhead, a clear indication that land was not far away. The men peered into the distance through their heavily salt-rimmed eyes, hoping to catch a glimpse of land through the hazy squall and billowing clouds which obscured their vision.

Shortly after midday, McCarthy let out a mighty yell – “*Land!*” As the clouds and mist broke, right ahead lay the rugged black mountains of South Georgia. One glimpse, though, and it was gone as the clouds and mist closed in again and shut out the wondrous sight.

Worsley's navigation had been impeccable and he remembered:

Q 1

“We looked at one another with cheerful foolish grins of joy. The feelings uppermost were ‘We’ve done it.’”⁹

Shackleton said:

“It was a glad moment. Thirst-ridden, chilled and weak as we were, happiness irradiated us. The job was nearly done.”¹⁰

However, they had reached the southern coast of the island, not the western end, which offered the easiest route to Leith or any of the other harbours of safety on the northern side. Nor was the weather prepared to release them from their torment. As they neared land, winds raced to about 60 mph and drove them dangerously close to the rocks. Worsley saw hazardous blind rolling waves, indicating shoals and reefs that would smash the *James Caird* to little pieces. It was far too risky to attempt a landing in the howling storm and the boat was taken back out to sea to stand off until the winds died down. It was so near, yet so far.

Daylight faded in the short winter's day and the winds rose in intensity. Throughout the miserable storm-tossed night, the

At the height of the crisis, Crean and Worsley were forced to crawl on their stomachs out onto the decking and hoist the sail to allow the little vessel a chance to get away from the dangerous rocks. It took several minutes before they were able to drag themselves to their feet, clinging onto the mainsail in the roaring storm and finally fixing the sail. They then had to repeat their hazardous trip, crawling on their stomachs in the pitching, rolling seas. It was another act of calm bravery and it almost certainly saved the *Caird* from destruction.

At around 4 pm the clouds lifted enough for them to catch sight of Annekov Island, a black 2,000-ft mountain which emerges from the sea about five miles (8 km) off the coast of South Georgia. The risk of running aground on reefs loomed again but, miraculously, the little boat cleared the danger and men faced up to the dreadful prospect of spending another night in the open sea. Worsley reported a "very heavy swell" as they laboured to avoid the rocks.

Daylight broke on 10 May to find that the storm had abated and the wind was blowing gently. They were now free to make a run for dry land, but there was another shock for the men as Crean crawled out from the bows. As he emerged, his large frame struck the thwart and the pin which held the mast clamp in place was dislodged. The pin had worked loose in the hurricane and Worsley observed that, had it dropped out during the storm, the mast would have "snapped like a carrot and no power on earth could have saved us". Luck had been with them, after all.

By noon they were close to Cape Demidov, the entrance to King Haakon Bay on the south of the island of South Georgia. But shortly afterwards, the winds began to blow in their faces, driving the boat away from land. They had no option but to lower sails and take to the oars. Two at a time, the men pulled and pulled, but after the privations and exhaustion of the past weeks, they were in no fit state. It was a hopeless task and the prospect of another night on board the boat looked likely.

They had already spent seventeen days in the open boat and were near the end of their tether. Another winter's night in the Southern Ocean without water or hot food might have been the last for some.

By late afternoon, with the light fading, they could just see a narrow passage, too narrow for sail. It required another supreme effort to row up to the channel. They pulled and then as they neared the gap, the oars were withdrawn and the boat passed through the small entrance like threading a needle.

Almost immediately, the little craft was carried on the in-coming waves and ground to a halt in a small cove. Shackleton leapt onto the shore and held the boat fast. The others clambered ashore and to their relief immediately found a welcome stream of fresh water, probably from a glacier. In an instant, they all fell to the knees and drank.

The little cove, about 360 ft (110 m) long and 180 ft (55 m) wide, was surrounded by imposing black cliffs rising to over 100 ft (30 m) and topped off with a layer of snow. At the head of the cove was a rocky beach and the sharp eyes of Crean soon spotted a small cave which he believed would provide them with shelter for the night.

It was late evening on 10 May 1916, and 522 days since they had last set foot on South Georgia.

which McNeish had fixed in the soles of their boots at Peggoty Camp had been worn away by the constant scrapes with rocks and packed ice in the past 36 hours. By now they were flush against the soles and without the extra grip, each of the men suffered some heavy falls on the glassy ice which shook them badly. Crean took a painful tumble and fell onto the blade of the carpenter's adze, narrowly avoiding a dangerous cut. Undeterred they picked him up and plodded on.

By now, as the end of the amazing journey approached, they began to ponder what people would make of the three ragamuffins who had come back from the dead. Worsley, in particular, became concerned that there might be women at Stromness who would be shocked at the appalling state of the three men.

The weary, bedraggled men were indeed a ghastly-looking sight. They had not washed for three months, their hair hung down onto their shoulders and their beards were matted with soot and blubber. Their haggard faces, which were blackened with grease, had been ravaged by a combination of frostbite, wind and exposure. They gave off a disgusting smell and their clothes, which they had worn for over a year, were wet and ragged. They had been on the march almost without a break for 36 hours and had probably covered around 40 miles (64 km) on their trek. Worsley said they were a "terrible looking trio of scarecrows".

After leaving South Georgia eighteen months earlier with 28 fit men and a fully-stocked ship, Crean, Worsley and Shackleton were returning to civilisation with just the clothes they stood up in.

They could not have imagined the welcome awaiting them as they turned the corner and walked slowly towards some outbuildings of the whaling station. The first humans they saw were two boys, aged about ten or twelve. They took one look at the "scarecrows" and fled in terror. Soon after they entered a building and found an old man who, like the young boys, turned on his heels and hurried away in alarm.

They moved onto the quay where they found a man called Matthias Anderson, who looked as though he was in charge of something or other. Shackleton, in a weak reedy voice, asked to see Anton Anderson, the station manager at Stromness.

It was 20 May 1916, and apart from their *Endurance* colleagues, some 532 days since they had last spoken to another human. Matthias Anderson shook his head and said Anton had left and been replaced by Thoralf Sorlle. By coincidence, Shackleton knew Sorlle.

Anderson was suspicious of the sight before him, but went into an office and told Sorlle that there were "three funny-looking men outside" who claimed to have walked across the island from the interior. As a precaution, Anderson asked the trio to remain outside while he spoke to Sorlle.

After a moment Sorlle, a tall imposing man with a large moustache, emerged from the building and stared in utter disbelief at the three unkempt wrecks of humanity who stood before him. He did not recognise them.

In fact, they were unrecognisable. But Sorlle knew Shackleton well and had entertained the party at South Georgia before the departure south. However *Endurance* had been out of touch for over 18 months and it was assumed all hands were lost. Shackleton recalled the first conversation:

"Mr Sorlle came out to the door and said, 'Well.'

'Don't you know me?' I said.

'I know your voice,' he replied doubtfully. 'You're the mate of the Daisy.'

'My name is Shackleton,' I said.

Immediately he put out his hand and said, 'Come in, come in.'"

Anderson turned away and wept.

Cape Evans before depotting supplies on the Barrier for the scheduled Trans-Antarctic Crossing.

The next act of kindness from the Norwegians was to offer the three men a welcome and sorely needed bath. Shackleton had warned their hosts that, after months without changing clothes or a wash, the men smelt badly. It was then, as they peeled off their worn and tattered garments and looked into the mirror, that the realisation of their appalling state began to dawn on the trio. The men were filthy, their hair was matted and their scraggy beards had grown uncontrollably. The dirt and grime helped obscure another side of their ordeal.

Beneath the layers of dirt, the three men were gaunt and hollow. They had the look of men who had come face to face with death.

After their hot bath, they ate a hearty meal and prepared to spend their first night between clean sheets for close on two years. Shackleton shared a room with Crean in Sorlle's house and he recalled that the pair were so comfortable and unaccustomed to luxury they could hardly sleep.

P | While Crean and Shackleton prepared to wallow in the comfort of a well-made bed, Worsley elected to fetch McCarthy, McNeish and Vincent, who were still under the *Caird* at King Haakon Bay on the other side of the island. Worsley climbed aboard the steam-driven whaler *Samson* for the eleven-hour trip around South Georgia to Peggoty Camp, where McCarthy, McNeish and Vincent were waiting patiently.

The exhausted Worsley slept through a raging gale on the stormy trip and landed on the beach to a surprising welcome. The three castaways, who had spent almost two years living close alongside Worsley, failed to recognise the well-dressed, clean-shaven man who stood before them. At first they thought it was a stranger and indignantly demanded to know why Shackleton, Crean or Worsley had not bothered to come to pick them up!

Worsley also recovered the *James Caird* from the beach and took it back to Stromness Bay with the three men, where they

crossing from Port Stanley to Punta Arena in their search for a rescue ship. It was about ten weeks since they had left Marston behind on Elephant Island but Crean was unequivocal about liberating his colleagues. He told Mrs Marston:

“Just a few lines to inform you about the welfare of your husband which no doubt you are anxiously awaiting for. But I must tell you, you don’t want to be alarmed for I am positive we shall get them safely back.

And I must inform you when I parted from him he was looking fit and well and he wanted very much to accompany us on our journey. But never mind we shall all be home soon. Please (God).”⁹

The three men once again passed through the Straits of Magellan to Chile, where Shackleton begged the Government to let him have the *Yelcho* for one more rescue attempt. The Chileans, who much admired the indomitable fighting spirit of the men, readily agreed.

On 25 August, the 150-ton steel-built steamer chugged out of Punta Arenas, through the Straits of Magellan, and headed south. The crew, mostly volunteers, were drawn from Chile’s navy and the Captain, Luis Pardo, was content to allow the peerless Worsley to navigate. Shackleton quickly assumed overall responsibility and faithfully promised the Chileans that he would not risk the *Yelcho* by taking her into the ice.

For once in the two-year *Endurance* expedition, luck was with the men as they progressed southwards in reasonably favourable seas. As they closed in on Elephant Island, the pack ice began to prise open. Even a bank of fog, which descended shortly afterwards, did not deter them and they slipped through the pack to the clearer ice-free seas which normally appear near to land.

With impeccable timing the fog soon lifted and the bleak cliffs and glaciers of Elephant Island came into full view. Crean,

Shackleton and Worsley scanned the coastline for familiar features and a hopeful sight of their lost comrades. After a tense period scouting back and forth, Worsley suddenly spotted the camp about one and a half miles away, though it was barely visible under a covering blanket of winter snow.

The rescuers and the rescued spotted each other almost simultaneously. Through binoculars it was possible to see tiny black figures scampering around the shore and waving frantically. Shackleton counted the animated little figures until he reached 22 and shouted that they were all there.

Standing on the gently rolling deck, Shackleton, Worsley and Crean looked at each other, each moved by the moment when their ordeal was finally over and the men had been saved. It was an outstanding achievement but Worsley said they were “all unable to speak”. Alongside them, some of the *Yelcho*’s crew broke down and cried.

Within minutes a boat was lowered and they began to pull towards the shore. Crean and Shackleton were on board, standing up, eagerly trying to identify the dark shapes moving about on the beach. As they rowed nearer to shore, Shackleton anxiously yelled out:

“Are you all well?”¹⁰

Wild, the faithful lieutenant who had held the men together for so long, shouted back:

“We are all well, Boss.”¹¹

As the Chilean sailors rowed the boat to shore, someone threw a packet of cigarettes which, Shackleton remembered, were leapt upon like “hungry tigers”. It was 30 August 1916, or 128 days (4½ months) since Shackleton, Worsley and Crean and the three others had sailed for help in the *James Caird*.

The men, slightly bewildered by the raucous noise after so long in isolated captivity, stepped off the ship and walked through the little town to the energetic music of a local brass band. Worsley, who like Crean and Shackleton, had already made friends with the Chileans, said the local hospitality knew no bounds.

The men were led to the Royal Hotel where they were presented to the thronging crowds from one of the upper windows. As speedily as the festivities would allow, the bedraggled men were fixed up with clean clothes, a welcome shave and a haircut. In the evening everyone gathered for a noisy jostling reception at the offices of the British Association.

Once again, Shackleton took the opportunity to thank people for their support and hospitality but he reserved special praise for the two companions who had endured the greatest ordeal with him. His simple, straightforward comment was:

"I cannot speak too highly of Crean and Worsley, who have seen this through with me."

Q My name has been known to the general public for a long time and it has mostly been as leader, but how much depends upon the men! What I do would be small, did we not work together. I appreciate my men on Elephant Island and the two I have on my right are fine fellows."³

The Chileans were determined to celebrate in lavish style, especially as it had been one of their ships and its sailors which had finally plucked the men off Elephant Island. The proud Chileans would allow no slacking in their endeavour to celebrate. At one lavish dinner, Worsley went outside for a breath of fresh air and was surrounded by a group of armed men with fixed bayonets. Asked why he was being threatened, Worsley was told that "no sober *gringo* (foreigner) leaves the building".

The generous hospitality of the Chileans and local expatriates continued for about twelve days until the party

rejoined the *Yelcho* and cruised up the coast to Valparaiso, to the north of the capital Santiago. When they arrived on 27 September the party were greeted with another rapturous reception from huge crowds of cheering people and it took the men 30 minutes to walk the 50 yards (45 m) from the ship to the local Naval Club because of the crush.

The Chilean president personally entertained the men and a few days later they set off by special train to cross the Andes for Buenos Aires, Argentina. Another rapid journey took some of the party to Montevideo where they could personally thank the people of Uruguay for their invaluable assistance.

But the attraction of continual celebration was beginning to wear thin and the men had their own plans. Many, notably the seamen, were anxious to get home as quickly as possible and join the fight against Germany. In contrast, Shackleton's concern was now focussed on the men from the *Aurora* in the Ross Sea party at Cape Evans on the other side of Antarctica. It was time to disband the expedition.

On 8 October 1916 the *Endurance* expedition finally came to an end on the concourse of a railway station in Buenos Aires as the men shook hands and went their own ways. Shackleton and Worsley had decided to head for McMurdo Sound via San Francisco and New Zealand, while Crean, Wild and the majority of the others turned for home.

The same could not be said of the *Aurora* party in the Ross Sea, which was cut off from the outside world for over two years and suffered appalling hardship as the men struggled to fulfil their obligation of laying supply depots for Shackleton's crossing of the continent. Three of the ten-man party died laying supplies of food and equipment for men who would never come.

The ten men knew nothing about the loss of *Endurance* and ploughed on regardless with their task of supplying the trans-Antarctic party. Dutifully they set about laying depots on the Barrier and up to the foot of the Beardmore Glacier for Shackleton's team, which was originally scheduled to make the

But by 1920 he had changed his mind, despite a personal approach from Shackleton who was putting together a new polar expedition.

At around the time Crean was leaving the Royal Navy in March 1920, Shackleton was completing a dreary series of twice-daily lectures on the *Endurance* expedition to audiences at London's Philharmonic Hall. A month earlier, in February 1920, Crean had attended the one-hundredth performance and was doubtless briefed about Shackleton's new ambitions.

Crean joined several other former *Endurance* hands – Wild, Worsley, James, Wordie, Hussey, and Orde-Lees – to relive the experience with Shackleton. Hussey played his banjo and newspapers reported that the men received “a very special reception” from the audience.

The audience, who paid between 1s 3d (6p) and 8s 6d (42½p) to see the explorers in the flesh, were invited to ask questions from the floor and Shackleton was taken aback when one man asked: “Was there not any use for a proper trained nurse?” The innocent question must have struck a chord for men with painful memories of almost two years of sexual deprivation and Shackleton diplomatically pointed out that women had so far not taken part in Antarctic exploration.

The lecture season was purgatory for Shackleton and he longed for the real thing. Initially he had plans for a trip to the Arctic north. He later changed his mind and declared his intention to circumnavigate the Antarctic Continent in a special ice ship. He bought a ship, renamed her *Quest* and began recruiting his tried and trusted comrades from *Endurance*.

First he wanted his two most loyal lieutenants, Crean and Wild, to accompany him on his latest adventure. Shackleton was so convinced that Crean would agree that he submitted the Irishman's name in a list given to the Admiralty in London of people prepared to join the expedition. The list included Wild, Worsley, Macklin and several others from *Endurance*.⁵

Shackleton told the Admiralty that he had picked a body of experienced men, who were “ready to go with me”. Crean was

to be “In charge of boatwork” and he gave the Admiralty a brief run-down on his long Antarctic career. Indeed, Shackleton was so enthusiastic that he mistakenly claimed that Crean had accompanied him South on the *Nimrod* expedition, during 1907–9, when he came to within 97 miles of the Pole.

But Tom Crean said no.

Crean, now a father and a prospective businessman, politely declined. His second daughter had arrived in 1920 and with a mixture of playful blarney and typical firmness, he told Shackleton that his wife and family now came first. Crean simply said:

“I have a long-haired pal now.”⁶

Quest, without the reassuring and formidable presence of Crean, sailed southwards in September 1921, with old *Endurance* colleagues forming the backbone of the expedition. On board with Shackleton and the faithful Wild were the instantly recognisable names of Worsley, Macklin, McIlroy, Hussey, McLeod, Kerr and Green. Three months later, on 5 January 1922, Shackleton died of a heart attack while the *Quest* was moored at the familiar setting of Grytviken, South Georgia.

In the period of only ten years, Crean had prematurely lost the two men – Scott and Shackleton – who had been so influential in his own life. Their loss aroused different emotions in Crean. He respected Scott but understood his weaknesses. In contrast, he worshipped Shackleton.

Crean had now decided where his priorities lay. First there was the matter of a family. His second child Katherine was a weak, sickly youngster who needed much care and attention from her concerned parents. Even today generations of Creans insist that the child was another unfortunate victim of Ireland's Troubles.

Nell was heavily pregnant with Kate when she became embroiled in an incident with the hated irregular soldiers of the Black and Tans. Nell, an independent and resolute woman, had