

The Winter Night

FIRST TF43 WINTERING-OVER PARTY

WITH BASES built and manned at Little America and McMurdo Sound, USS GLACIER sailed northward from Antarctica at the end of Operation Deep Freeze I. Aboard the powerful icebreaker was Rear Admiral George Dufek, Commander of Task Force 43, who had supervised the freezing-in of two fuel barges at McMurdo Sound to increase that base's readiness to handle flights in Operation Deep Freeze II. The admiral had said farewell to 93 Americans at McMurdo Sound and to 73 at Little America before GLACIER began her counter-clockwise cruise of the Antarctic continent looking for further base sites on the Knox Coast and the Weddell Sea.

It was March of 1960. Wintering-over had begun. But the workload precluded reminiscing at either base. Interiors of buildings had to be completed, supplies had to be retrieved from the snow, tired tractors needed maintenance after a strenuous unloading schedule, routine had to be set and responsibilities assigned for the long winter night fast approaching.

Ships had unloaded 900 tons of supplies at McMurdo for building a base at the South Pole and a similar amount at Little America to be used in building Byrd Station in Marie Byrd Land. Long, hard, cold man-hours were spent sorting and packaging these mountains of supplies. At McMurdo each item had to be packaged for airdrop at the South Pole. At Little America each piece must be loaded on sleds which tractors would drag 647 miles over the ice to 80° South, 120° West.

Abetting the physical energy required to find and park the items was the mental strain of attention to detail, for planners knew by experience that there are no nail kegs, no corner stores, no means of makeshift once the builders arrived in Antarctica's barren

heartland to erect their bases. If they didn't carry their provisions with them they would do without.

Lights were rigged at each base against the day the sun would drop below the horizon—April 21—to remain hidden until August 21. These lights proved satisfactory at hilly McMurdo Sound but a complete nuisance at level Little America where their glow cast harsh shadows over the snow and confused men seeking spare parts buried under tons of snow.

Between February and October Little America recorded 154 inches of snowfall. Coupled with snow drifting unimpeded over the featureless Ross Ice Barrier, it covered or nearly covered all buildings before the four-month night ended.

Lowest temperature was recorded August 9 at Little America—minus 78 degrees Fahrenheit. McMurdo's low of minus 58, registered a day earlier, was in fact

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COONSKIN CAP, CHIN BEAVER PROCLAIM THE VETERAN.



- VICE PRESIDENT Richard M. Nixon presents the Distinguished Service Medal to Admiral George Dufek as Thomas S. Gates, Secretary of the Navy (center) looks on.