



LARGEST tractor train ever assembled in Antarctica moves across the face of the flat icefields into Marie Byrd Land. "Cateran" is crossing treacherous crevasse areas.

CREVASSE JUNCTION

Sixtyloads averaging 20 tons' payload each followed rumbling tractors over the soft snow at three miles per hour.

Meantime the advance party refueled and headed deeper into Marie Byrd Land, planting trail flags five to a mile along the pencil-straight trail which on completion was named Army-Navy Drive.

The heavy train averaged 45 miles per day out of Little America, reaching Crevasse Junction on December 9. Army First Lieutenant Philip Smith was flown back from the advance party to help the tractor train through the danger area.

With the train drawn up into a 375-yard column on the Little America side of the chasma, the first of twelve sleds was dragged across. No cracks were opened.

It had been planned to pull one sled across every twelve hours, allowing the ice to settle between loads. When no cracks opened after the second crossing the time was cut in half and tractors rumbled cautiously across the closely marked trail at six-hour intervals.

After delivering the tenth sled an empty tractor was returning to camp when its driver Ben Melton felt the dreaded catkiner's nightmare . . . his Cat lurched downward and to the left. He knew it meant a breakthrough but kept his gears engaged until his heavy tractor reached safety.

Immediately the blasting crew exploded the cracked snow bridge and from under-ice observation located a detour route for the remaining two sleds.

Safely on the Rockefeller Plateau the train formed up for the remaining 457-mile trek to 80° South, 120° West. The trail ahead ran almost constantly uphill until, at the base site, the elevation was 5,150 feet. The trip was marked by monotony, miserable weather, mechanical problems, and boredom but four buildings for Byrd Station were delivered at 2 p.m. December 23. The first one was converted from sled cargo to a meteorology building within nine hours of the train's arrival.

Burning 11,000 gallons of fuel provided almost exclusively by airlift, the train had accomplished successfully the longest and largest tractor swing in Antarctic history.