

Ballenys Christmas

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 22

We left station to head for the Balleny Islands today and before night were heading into a pack of icebergs. As we picked our way through them the sea started becoming a little more rough.

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 23

We are only about 100 miles from the Ballenys now and it is a welcome sight to see the sea birds wheeling about the ship. They are really graceful and although small compared with gulls, glide with ease in the strong wind.

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 24

Nothing to do but wait for Christmas. We are still out

of sight of the Ballenys and won't approach until tomorrow. There are a few Christmas decorations about the ship, mostly synthetic trees, although there is a small one from Campbell Island on the bridge.

One of the cooks has made a church and covered it with frosting. Quite impressive and the most cheery thing on board.

CHRISTMAS DAY

Balleny Islands. They may as well have been icebergs. Apart from a little rock at the foot of sheer cliffs all we could see was ice, plateaus about 600 feet high and stark. At least we are in the Antarctic Circle. At midday the most junior officer,

Ensign D. A. Nickel, marched forward to the bullnose with his assistants. Lieutenant (j.g.) B. P. Schultz and Ensign L. Dags, to perform the Bluenose ceremony.

Dressed in full dress whites, with sword, he had to paint the bullnose blue, signifying the ship had crossed the circle. It will remain blue for 6 months, and in the freezing conditions the three Bluenose painters thought they would too.

After a dinner of turkey and other traditional food the officers had a small party — with egg nog — and gave presents, ranging from

CONCLUDING our staff reporter's account of a trip south in the picket ship U.S.S. Calcaterra.

potatoes to dolls and globes of the world to muzzles. I soon learned who they were for and why.

Now back to picket station.

BOXING DAY

Still steaming amongst icebergs, and about 10 a.m. found one with five pinnacles and a submerged base. It was about 600ft long, and although not the largest we had seen, the most beautiful.

The captain, Lieutenant-commander W. C. Earl, eased the ship into one of the crevasses and at one stage men were able to reach out and touch the ice.

DECEMBER 28

We are back on station, and days are beginning to merge into one another.

The sea is still quite calm but with enough swell to make the ship roll. Nothing but balloon launches, bathythermal drops and rolling.

DECEMBER 31

The Gary is on the way to relieve us. I think that means more to us all than the fact it is New Year's Eve. Soon we will be able to start back for Dunedin. The boredom is becoming worse, as are the films.

At midnight there were about a dozen men sitting in the mess decks playing cards. The ship's whistle blew and that was our New Year.

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JANUARY 1

We leave station today and everyone is very happy about it. The crew have a holi-

day today, except for those standing watches. There is nothing for them to do, apart from sleep, play cards, or read. Tempers are becoming a little frayed and there have been a couple of fights.

JANUARY 2

Only another two days to Dunedin and many of the crew are getting channel fever. I had heard of this and can now understand it. The films and bingo are still the only two distractions from the sea, and they are most welcome.

JANUARY 3

We reached Campbell

Island in the early afternoon and a boat came out from the shore to bring mail letters by the Gary. It was wonderful to see land again. All the men who weren't on watch crowded on to the decks as we lay to in the harbour.

Everyone is feeling much happier and we should reach Dunedin shortly after noon tomorrow. The crew in the radar department will be glad of the rest from now on. They must have had an exhausting time leading the ship through the hundreds of icebergs.

JANUARY 4

We reached the head of the harbour at 1 p.m. and as we waited for the pilot, dolphins played around the ship. I doubt if our welcome could have been better. The sun was hot and it was the first time for three weeks one could stand in shirt sleeves on the deck without feeling cold.

The hills looked beautiful and I have never appreciated them more. The men are happy. There will be mail waiting for them from home and a number will be taking liberty and seeing the country.

Crowds were waiting on the wharf and as I left the ship and stood on familiar ground again I felt the trip, with all its boredom and deprivations, had been worthwhile, simply to feel so happy at returning.



ENSIGN D. A. NICKEL, accompanied by Lieutenant (j.g.) B. P. Schultz, in the traditional ceremony of crossing the Antarctic circle, paints the bullnose blue. The Balleny Islands can be seen through the nose.