

Maritime Support for Great Britain's Antarctic Sovereignty Claim: Operation Tabarin and the 1944-45 Voyage of the Newfoundland Sealing Ship *Eagle*

Anthony Dickinson

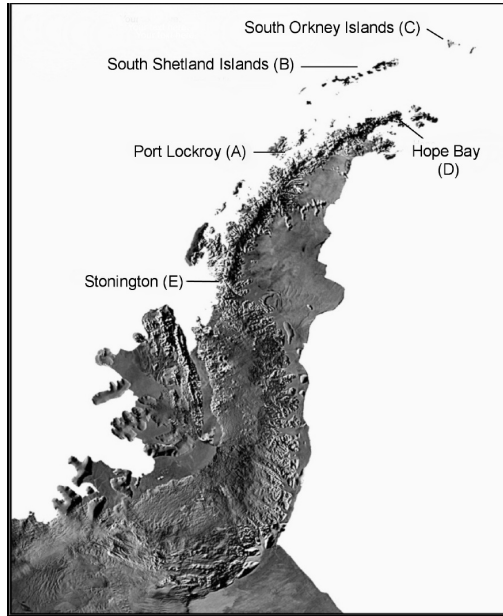
Le gouvernement de l'Argentine a profité de la Seconde Guerre mondiale pour mettre en évidence son droit de propriété présumé sur les dépendances antarctiques des îles Malouines, revendiquées par la Grande-Bretagne. Face au problème, la Grande-Bretagne a décidé d'occuper la région de façon permanente en 1943, lorsqu'elle a lancé l'opération Tabarin, une expédition quasi-militaire secrète. En l'absence d'un navire de charge renforcé pour la navigation dans les glaces, les objectifs immédiats n'ont pas été atteints, mais la situation s'est réglée en février 1945 à la suite de l'affrètement du bateau de chasse au phoque Eagle de Terre-Neuve et son équipage expérimenté en navigation dans les glaces. Le présent exposé décrit la contribution de Terre-Neuve aux débuts de la présence britannique permanente en Antarctique.

British territorial claims in the South Atlantic and Antarctic have long been challenged by Argentina, but elicited little response until the early years of the Second World War, in part because of the need to sustain the supply of meat to Great Britain. However this changed in 1939 after Argentina set up a National Antarctic Commission to move forward its claim, and dispatched the naval vessel *Primero de Mayo* in 1942 and 1943 to place various symbols of Argentine occupation on the South Shetland Islands and Antarctic Peninsula.¹

When the British government was informed by Argentina of its "official" possession, Britain reacted by sending the armed merchant cruiser HMS *Carnarvon Castle* to perform similar acts in January 1943. However, recognizing that permanent occupation and use are central to a territorial claim, the War Cabinet decided on 28

¹ See, for example, [Anon]. 1946, (pub.1947). "Argentine and Chilean territorial claims in the Antarctic," *Polar Record*, 4(32): 412-17; A.Howkins, Icy relations: the emergence of South American Antarctica during the second World War, *Polar Record*, 42 (221):153-65.

January 1943 that “all possible steps should be taken to strengthen our title to the Antarctic Dependencies against which the Argentines encroach.”² This did not sit well with Churchill, at the time on his way back to London from the Casablanca Conference of Allied leaders, who was concerned that the wartime relationship with the anti-colonial United States might be damaged. Nonetheless, a fourteen-man military-civilian secretive mission, Naval Party 145, later changed to Operation Tabarin³ after a decidedly non-clandestine night club in Paris popular with German officers, was fielded. Organized from the Colonial Office, but operated under the auspices of the Admiralty for improved security and fiscal control, the expedition was to set up bases at Deception Island (Base B) in the South Shetland Islands group; and Hope Bay (Base D) on the northeast tip of the Antarctic Peninsula. A decision not to set one up on the South Orkney Islands because of the Argentine presence on Laurie Island from January 1904, when the Scottish National Antarctic expedition gave them their base, and the related assumption by Britain that their claim might thus be difficult to justify, was later reversed in favour of placing one (Base C) at Sandefjord Bay, Coronation Island.



Actual and proposed British bases in Antarctica, 1944-45 (Author)

A science and surveying program was belatedly set out⁴ to give a non-political slant to this urgent move to expand the frontiers of the empire before South American governments and the United States became aware of it. Putting personnel quickly into the field was, however, much more important than what they were going to do when they got there! In a similar vein, the story was also concocted that Operation Tabarin was being despatched to look for, and discourage, any German military presence in the region, something which its personnel complement and lack of military weapons would have made problematic. Nonetheless, Britain was

² Quoted in J. R. Dudeney and D. W. H. Walton, 2011. “From *Scotia* to Operation Tabarin: developing British policy for Antarctica,” *Polar Record*, 48 (4): 342-360. This provides the most detailed treatment of the political landscape leading to Operation Tabarin and the voyage of *Eagle*.

³ For Operation Tabarin, see S. Haddelsey and A. Carroll, 2014. *Operation Tabarin, Britain’s secret wartime expedition to Antarctica, 1944-46*, (London). Fifteen were selected, but one, a geologist with a tropical background, decided not to go.

⁴ Draft Programme of Work, November 1943, Andrew Taylor Collection, Box 8, File 4, University of Manitoba archives, (UMAN).

concerned that if the neutral, but Axis leaning, Argentina did take control of Deception Island, they might allow the Kriegsmarine to use an abandoned British whaling station as a repair and replenishment site for its surface raiders, then sinking Allied merchant ships in the southern oceans from a disused station on Îles Kerguelen.⁵

To lead Tabarin, Lieutenant Commander James William Slessor Marr, RNVR,⁶ an experienced polar hand, was recalled from minesweeping duty in Ceylon (Sri Lanka). The SS *Veslekaryi*, an old Norwegian sealing ship⁷ renamed as HMS *Bransfield*, was brought from exile in Iceland to take the party south. Her crew of three officers and fifteen men, commanded by the splendidly named Lieutenant Victor Aloysius John Baptist Marchesi, RN,⁸ were designated as Naval Party 146. Marchesi would be second-in-command in the field. However, the urgent need for the committee to get the expedition south before others became aware of it and established their own bases, had caused them to buy a ship which proved unseaworthy soon after leaving Tilbury Docks, London. As a result, it was not until 14 December 1943 that Operation Tabarin finally sailed for the Falkland Islands via Gibraltar, Dakar and Montevideo on the liner/troop ship *Highland Monarch*. Supported by the ex-research ship HMS *William Scoresby* with Marchesi in command, and the coastal freighter SS *Fitzroy* chartered from the Falkland Islands Co., the main commercial interest in the colony, Operation Tabarin established its primary supply and logistics base (B) in the abandoned whaling station on Deception Island on 3 February 1944.⁹ However, it failed to set up the base at Hope Bay, although five of the party went ashore from the ice-reinforced *William Scoresby* on 7 February, because the master of the *Fitzroy* was unwilling to take his unstrengthened ship into the ice-filled bay with the hut and supplies, fearing that the Falkland's only maritime link with the outside world might be incapacitated. Although an alternative base (A) was set up on 15 February at the more accessible Port Lockroy, Wiencke Island, off the coast of Graham Land, this location did not address the government's requirement for a base on the continent *per se*. The extensive surveying and mapping sledge journeys considered necessary for further strengthening its claim were precluded, and in any case huskies had not been provided. As a result, a major priority in 1944 for the Operation Tabarin committee in London,¹⁰ and its Colonial Office masters, was that of redressing the *Bransfield-Fitzroy* fiasco by finding an ice-strengthened vessel capable of carrying a heavy cargo

⁵ J.D.M.Blyth, "German raiders in the Antarctic during the second world war," *Polar Record*, 6: 399-403; A.G.E.Jones, "Protecting the whaling fleet during World War II," *British Antarctic Survey Bulletin*, 38: 37-41.

⁶ Y. Foote, [nd.] "Marr, James William Slessor, (1902-65), Marine Biologist and Polar Explorer," *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/6658>. He was promoted to lieutenant commander at the age of forty especially for the mission.

⁷ G.-Kjell Kjaer and M. Sefland, "The Arctic ship *Veslekari*," *Polar Record*, 41 (216): 57-65.

⁸ Obituary, *Daily Telegraph* (London), 13 February 2007.

⁹ Operated (1912-31) by the Hector Whaling Co., London.

¹⁰ The committee was led by Dr James Mann Wordie. M Smith, *Sir James Wordie*, (Edinburgh, 2004).

load, and with a crew used to working in ice. If this was not possible, the attempt to establish a British presence on continental Antarctica would be delayed further, and possibly be pre-empted.

A replacement for the *Bransfield* was not available in Europe due to the exigencies of war, and searching elsewhere, particularly in the United States, would expose Operation Tabarin. A belated decision was made to search for one in the Dominion of Newfoundland, once the possessor of the largest fleet of ice-strengthened ships and with a history of providing support for polar expeditions. Some measure of secrecy would also be possible, the historic movement of ships and men to far-flung places generated little untoward interest and St. John's was a departure point for transatlantic convoys. Therefore on 17 March 1944 the Montreal representative of the British Ministry of War Transport asked his counterpart in St. John's, Eric Bowring, to approach his family's company, Bowring Bros., to see if one of their sealing vessels, preferably an oil burner, might be available to work in the south during 1945. However the deployment of vessels for the war effort meant that the only one available from their once extensive fleet was the antiquated coal burning *Eagle* which, being uneconomical to operate, spent most of its time alongside in harbour.

The vessel was the last of three to carry that name for Bowrings. The current version was built in 1902 as the SS *Sophie*, in Sandefjord, Norway, for the whaling magnate Johan Bryde, but bought and renamed by Bowrings in 1903. Although the *Eagle* was not suitable for the long and arduous voyage, being old, slow, coal burning, and in some disrepair despite Bowring's assertions to the contrary, a charter party was arranged. This gave the Operation Tabarin committee an immediate solution to its transport dilemma, and Bowrings an opportunity to generate revenue from a redundant vessel. Following a survey, which but for the war and need, she might not have passed, the owners were notified on 30 September 1944 that "your vessel *Eagle* is hereby requisitioned under regulation 53 of the Defence (General) Regulations 1939 for urgent government service...you should act as managers on behalf of the Ministry [of War Transport]." The agreement was finalised¹¹ with the understanding that she would arrive at Port Stanley, the capital the Falkland Islands, by the end of December 1944. That date was determined by the most likely time when the ice off the Antarctic Peninsula would become navigable. The *Eagle* would work with the *William Scoresby*, *Fitzroy*, and the Operation Tabarin party to establish Base D, re-supply Bases A and B, transfer personnel between the three, and help set up Base C at Sandefjord Bay.¹² In keeping with the secretive nature of the expedition, both Bowrings and the locally hired crew were required to keep the voyage and

¹¹ Ministry of War Transport, St. John's, to Ministry of War Transport, London, 30 September 1944. CO 78/217/2, TNA; Charter Party, 11 October 1944, Andrew Taylor Collection, Box 8, File 2, UMAN.

¹² Secretary of State for the Colonies to Governor, Falkland Islands, AD8/1/10 (1), 10 October 1944, BAS; Fleet Officer, Newfoundland, to Naval Officer-in-Command, Falkland Islands, [nd.], AD8/1/10(1), British Antarctic Survey, BAS, Archives Service (BAS); Fleet Officer, Newfoundland, to Naval Officer-in-Command, Falkland Islands, AD8/1/10 (1), 26 October 1944, BAS.



Eagle at Deception Island, February 1945. Photographer James Farrington (Reproduced courtesy of BAS Archives Service, AD6/19/1/A220/4, Copyright: Natural Environmental Research Council)

destination to themselves. The dates would soon prove to be unrealistic.

Having decided on the new vessel, the committee turned its attention to the second major need, that of finding huskies to be shipped south for the *Eagle* to transfer to Hope Bay. On 19 September 1944 two new members, Surgeon Commander E.W. Bingham and Captain N.B. “Freddy” Marshall, flew to Gander, Newfoundland, to buy twenty-five dogs in Labrador.¹³ Bingham, the only Operation Tabarin member with husky experience, had wintered in Labrador during HMS *Challenger’s* 1933-34 survey of the area.¹⁴ The inexperienced Marshall was considered suitable because he was a zoologist!

While this search was proceeding, *Eagle* was being refitted at the Newfoundland Dockyard.¹⁵ A request from Bowring Bros. to install an echo sounder to improve navigation in the poorly charted Antarctic waters was not approved, another poor decision which became partly responsible for problems she faced at Hope Bay. *Eagle*

¹³ These were bought from settlements north of Nain, and shipped via St. John’s, Halifax and Montreal, ultimately on the Free French vessel SS *Indochinoise* to Liverpool. After a short quarantine they left on the *Highland Monarch* for Montevideo where they were collected by the *Fitzroy* and taken to Port Stanley for the *Eagle*. See A.B. Dickinson, “Labrador Huskies in the Falkland Islands and Antarctica,” *Newfoundland and Labrador Studies*, 31(1): 246-64 (2015).

¹⁴ For Bingham, A. Stephenson and E.W.K Walton, “Surgeon-Captain Edward W. Bingham,” *Polar Record*, 30 (172): 68-70. For the overwintering, see T. Hampson, “HMS *Challenger’s* Wintering Party, 1933-34: A Labrador Journal,” *The Northern Mariner/le marin du nord*, XV(1):27-74.

¹⁵ Bowring Bros. [n.d]. “List of merchant ships repaired in the Newfoundland Dockyard, October 1944,” FA 207, MG 39, Box 3, The Rooms, Provincial Archives Division, St. John’s, hereafter RPAD. At a cost of \$10,798.

left St. John's on 24 October 1944, ten days behind the date set by the committee, in convoy WB 133 for North Sydney, Nova Scotia.¹⁶

Fortunately for both Operation Tabarin and Britain's sovereignty objectives, the unsuitability of *Eagle* was outweighed by the quality and dedication of its master, Captain Robert Carl Sheppard, and his personally chosen crew of twenty-seven ice-experienced and, in some cases, elderly Newfoundlanders. The bosun/3rd officer "Skipper Tom" Carroll was eighty-one and a virtual resident aboard the *Eagle*, chief engineer Lewis and chief officer Butler were seventy-seven and sixty-eight respectively, and both long-time employees of Bowrings, with Sheppard himself being almost fifty-eight!¹⁷ Born on 31 January 1897, Sheppard came from a long-established Newfoundland maritime family. His grandfather had worked for the government as a lighthouse keeper, including those at Cape Spear and Fort Amherst which guarded the approaches to St. John's harbour. After finishing his secondary education, Robert Carl enlisted on 8 September 1914, becoming one of the "First Five Hundred" (#473), in the Royal Newfoundland Regiment. He served overseas at Gallipoli, Suvla, and Beaumont Hamel. Wounded when working as a wire cutter, he was invalided home and honourably discharged on 28 March 1917.¹⁸ Recommended by the military for navigation and seamanship studies, Sheppard sailed to the Caribbean and Mediterranean on schooners carrying salt fish in one direction and returning with rum, molasses and other products, learning much from his uncle, the locally renowned master Captain Robert Wakeham. In 1920 he entrenched himself further into the Newfoundland maritime tradition by marrying Sadie Addison Kean, granddaughter of the legendary sealing master Captain Abram Kean. After the birth of his son Robert, Sheppard came ashore in 1924 to succeed his grandfather at the Fort Amherst light. During the Second World War he served as a British merchant navy master in transatlantic convoys. He returned to St. John's in 1944 to become the harbour master, but months later Bowrings recommended him to the Operation Tabarin committee. As the holder of master's tickets in both sail and steam, he was a good choice to command the *Eagle*.

After loading coal at North Sydney, *Eagle* continued to Halifax to obtain marine stores and provisions not readily available in St. John's. Another delay was experienced when a new dynamo had to be installed, and the ship rigged to Royal Navy blackout standards. On 7 November *Eagle* left unescorted for Bermuda. In warmer waters, the years of seal oil in her deck planks bubbled out in the heat, producing a stench which permeated the ship and made the deck to slippery to walk on until the crew could lay board walks at St. George's, Bermuda. Sailing next to

¹⁶ H. Squires, *SS Eagle -The Secret Mission, 1944-45*, (St. John's, 1992) is the personal voyage account of the radio operator. See Telegram, CO 78/217/6, TNA, for the convoy.

¹⁷ The names of the crew are in R.C. Sheppard, *Antarctica. Voyage of the SS Eagle, 1944-1945*, Photograph Album, VA10, #2, RPAD. A crew list may also be found at Andrew Taylor Collection, Box 11, folder 26, 1-23 to 25, UMAN

¹⁸ Sheppard's war record is at http://www.therooms.ca/regiment/soldier_files/, and <http://boulderpublications.ca/book/first-five-hundred-royal-newfoundland-regiment-galipoli-and-western-front-during-great-war>.

Trinidad, the engine broke down on 19 November. Those working to effect repairs in the poorly ventilated engine room suffered greatly from the unaccustomed heat. Although she quickly completed bunkering and watering, *Eagle* could not immediately leave Port of Spain because six of the crew had developed a fever which required medical attention and rest. But spirits were raised when Captain Sheppard allowed each of the crew to buy a dozen bottles of rum each at seventy-five cents per bottle, even though it was to remain under his control and be used as and when he saw fit!

Eagle made her next bunkering call on 4 December at Belém on the River Pará in northeast Brazil. With nine of the crew now debilitated, medical attention caused more delay. A new and major concern was that the only coal available was a low quality dusty and poorly burning South African product, which Sheppard had no choice but to accept, albeit under protest to the British consul. His fears on its suitability were well-founded; six hours after sailing the fire bars in the port furnace fused together when the abundant coal dust ignited in the ash pit. More delay followed as *Eagle* anchored in the river for twelve hours so that the long-suffering stokers could extinguish the furnaces and install new bars. Seven hours later the starboard furnace suffered the same problem (and delay). The crew then mixed the South African coal with their reserve stock of high quality coal from North Sydney, and *Eagle* arrived at Recife on Saturday, 16 December without incident. Sheppard was quick to praise his crew, especially “the devotion to duty displayed by my Chief Engineer [Charles Lewis] (a man of 77 years of age) and his staff, in their endeavour to carry out the above repairs in the shortest possible time. Most of the staff were ill at the time, nevertheless they set to work with a will and were on the verge of exhaustion when the work was completed.”¹⁹

At Recife bunkering was delayed by a Sunday and a national holiday the next day. Repairs also had to be made after an undertow pushed the bow into the dock and a Brazilian navy corvette collided with the stern while mooring. When *Eagle* sailed on 23 December, she left a stoker in hospital for repatriation to Newfoundland.

Proceeding down the South American coast, stormy seas and poor visibility forced reduced speed. Continuing sickness in the crew hampered this leg of the voyage, and “coupled with the fact that half the stokers were off duty due to illness, it is surprising that even a speed of five knots was maintained in such weather. Here, again, I attribute the more or less efficient manner in which steam was maintained to my aged but energetic Chief Engineer.”²⁰ The repaired bow was again damaged, causing more delay. More significantly, chief officer Abner Butler became seriously ill on 6 January 1945, giving Sheppard cause for concern that he might not be able to get *Eagle* to Montevideo in time to save Butler's life. Although in poor health during the earlier part of the voyage, he had remained on duty and refused to consult doctors at the various ports of call, no doubt assuming that he would be put ashore. Sheppard

¹⁹ R. C. Sheppard, Report on the Voyage of *Eagle*, 31 March 1945, 2, Andrew Taylor Collection, Box 8, File 19, [para 12], UMAN. This was Sheppard's official report to Sir Alan Cardinall, governor of the Falkland Islands.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, [para 14].

could not “but admire his somewhat mistaken idea of devotion to duty in his determination to carry on, especially in view of his age, and I did not know that he was suffering from a serious strangulated hernia.”²¹ Fortunately, Sheppard’s fears were unfounded, and the ailing officer was taken to hospital and operated on before being repatriated. Sheppard then promoted his cousin, second officer Robert Whitten, to be chief officer, had the bow re-repaired, and loaded expedition cargo that had arrived from the United Kingdom. On 10 January *Eagle* sailed for the Falkland Islands. As a result of these many pre-departure and in-transit delays, *Eagle* did not anchor at Port Stanley until 17 January 1945 rather than at the end of December 1944 as the Operation Tabarin committee had optimistically required.

With part of the Antarctic shipping season now missed, *Eagle* had to leave Port Stanley quickly if she was to fulfill her mandate before the ice became impassable. She sailed for Deception Island on 24 January accompanied by the *Fitzroy*. Marr, who had come to Port Stanley from Port Lockroy in the *William Scoresby* to supervise the cargo handling, and Lieutenant David James,²² a new Operation Tabarin surveyor, joined *Eagle*. James later described the ship as a “villainously dirty wooden steamer with a clipper bow... [whose skipper] being 50 but looking 35, [had] a soft voice and beautiful manners which clearly cloaked a character of considerable determination.”²³ James had taken over responsibility for managing the huskies which boarded *Eagle* at Port Stanley after being brought here from Montevideo on the *Fitzroy*.

The first three days of the voyage passed without incident in fair weather. However a severe gale sprang up on 28 January. Sheppard was swept off the bridge onto the deck, breaking at least three ribs, and knocked unconscious. This did not bode well for the voyage, since Sheppard’s reduced mobility prevented him taking navigation sights, and with the loss of chief officer Butler there was nobody else in the crew with the expertise. Lieutenant James, having some knowledge of the process from his service volunteered to take them, but Sheppard continued to reduce them despite his injuries.

As soon as *Eagle* anchored at Deception Island on 29 January, Marr sent the *William Scoresby* to Port Lockroy to fetch the expedition medical officer Surgeon Lieutenant Eric Back²⁴ to examine Sheppard. Back recommended that Sheppard

²¹ Ibid., [para 16].

²² James was born 25 December 1919 into the family that owned Torosay Castle, Isle of Mull, Scotland. After graduating from Oxford University in 1938, he enlisted in the RNVR. He was captured in February 1943 when the motor gun boat he commanded was sunk off the Hook of Holland. James escaped from prison and made his way back to London on neutral Scandinavian vessels. After a brief leave, he was posted to the Department of Naval Intelligence and then Operation Tabarin. David James returned to Antarctica in 1946 as the civilian technical advisor for the film *Scott of the Antarctic*, some of the scenes being shot there from the Newfoundland vessel MV *Trepassey*. He then spent time as a rubber planter in India and Malaya before being active in British politics as a Conservative MP (1957-1979). He retired to restore Torosay Castle. He died on 15 December 1986.

²³ D. James, *That Frozen Land*, (London, 1949), gives an account of his time in Antarctica.

²⁴ T. Edelsten, Back obituary, *British Medical Journal*, (306): 1536, (1993). An ancestor, Admiral Sir George Back, made four Arctic journeys, including two under Franklin.

return to Port Stanley for a more thorough examination, but he refused on the grounds that without him, and thus *Eagle*, the attempt to establish the base at Hope Bay would be cancelled for at least another year. As a compromise, Marr allowed the *Eagle* to remain at Base B for ten days to give Sheppard time to recover, yet another delay. However, Back still had misgivings, and according to Sheppard

only allowed me to come to sea in the ship on the understanding that I move about as little as possible, and had accepted my word that I should do as he had recommended. Now, he continued, he had come to inform me that he must wash his hands clear of me, as he could not accept responsibility should complications set in. He ended up by saying that I was now eligible for membership in the fraternity known to medical men as 'The Cranks', who call their doctor in when ill for the purpose only of diagnosing their own illness and suggesting treatment.²⁵

Back seemed to have enjoyed his visit to *Eagle*, judging Sheppard to be "not too bad," the crew "sound fellows," and chief officer Robert Whitten, "who had been to 80° N in sealers, was most interesting!"²⁶ Lieutenant James was similarly impressed with the aged ex-bosun, now 3rd officer, Tom Carroll, who "has the beautiful soft accent and natural dignity of the Highland crofter and Irish peasant," a description which he might not have entirely appreciated!²⁷ Carroll was to gain even more respect from the Operation Tabarin party when he demonstrated how to flense a seal, it "being fascinating to see the adroit speedy way in which he removed the heavy jacket of skin and blubber over an inch thick. Later we were to find that it took two unskilled men over an hour to do the same job. He had it all completed in less than ten minutes."²⁸ For Robert Whitten, "a cousin of the captain who he openly worships...not even his greatest admirer could call him handsome, but there is something very likeable about him - his pride in his cousin, and in his new sextant, his anxiety to please and his keenness on the expedition."²⁹ Sheppard and radio

²⁵ Robert C. Sheppard, "The Sound of Fury; Newfoundland's Lucky *Eagle* in the Antarctic," Andrew Taylor Collection, Box 12, folder 14, 3-7 [Sheppard], UMAN; Ed. Note: "The Sound of Fury" is Sheppard's memoir. There are three versions of it in the Taylor collection. The citation here is from one of two versions within Box 12. This version has Sheppard's memoir in a 1986 typescript by Andrew Taylor, divided into chapters, each in a separate folder. These are interspersed with Taylor's own comments in longhand, generally on yellow lined paper. He prepared these as he worked towards having the whole work published, something that was never achieved. A second version, also in Box 12, at folder 24, is a "complete" typescript, not divided into chapters, and lacking Taylor's comments. The third is at Box 11, Folder 33. There are minor textual variations between each of the three typescripts. The version divided into chapters with Taylor's comments is most frequently used here. Attribution to Sheppard or Taylor is made in square brackets.

²⁶ James, 65.

²⁷ Ibid, 66.

²⁸ Ibid, 77.

²⁹ Ibid, 66.

officer Harold Squires³⁰ were considered by James the only ones on the ship able to keep themselves clean!

As Sheppard rested, the Hope Bay cargo and huskies were re-loaded while the *William Scoresby* returned to Port Lockroy for the Operation Tabarin personnel transferring to the new base. *William Scoresby* and *Fitzroy* then left for Port Stanley taking Marr, who “being a simple and over-conscientious type... had developed a conviction of inadequacy” and was homeward-bound after resigning 7 February as leader.³¹ Marr’s misfortune led to the appointment on 8 February 1945 of his second-in-command, Captain Andrew Taylor, Royal Canadian Engineers, in overall charge of the field parties.³² This gave him the distinction of becoming the only Canadian to lead an Antarctic expedition, although others have participated.³³ Sheppard and Taylor were to work closely together during the Hope Bay attempt, and corresponded with each other over the years thereafter.

Sheppard decided that he would sail on a calm day with Back’s agreement, and after almost three and a half months of arduous travel, *Eagle* and her crew embarked on the main part of their mission when Sheppard took his ship out of Whalers Bay, Deception Island. On 11 February as she steamed along the Graham Land coast, even though the crew was used to the icy waters off Newfoundland and Labrador, they were awed by the magnificent scenery unfolding before them. As Sheppard later recorded

Even I, who cannot see much to get excited about over masses of desolate looking ice-covered rock, was, momentarily captivated by the terrible lonely and majestic beauty of it all. Since that afternoon, it has been my fortune to see many such illustrations of the handicraft of Old Mother Nature in all their wild and desolate splendour. Admittedly such surroundings have an adverse psychological effect on me, and in their presence I find it difficult to repress a feeling of utter loneliness. I think have come to an understanding, and

³⁰ Born 23 June 1923 in St. John’s, Harold Squires first went to sea in 1940 on cargo ships in North Atlantic wartime convoys. He then sailed in 1941 in the SS *Moyra*, an old cargo vessel used by the Newfoundland Railway Co. between Halifax and New York, and that same year became certified as a Canadian Marconi Co. radio officer. Unable to find a suitable berth in St. John’s, he went to Halifax and registered with the British Manning Pool from where he was selected to serve on *Eagle*. Harold Squires died in 2010, the last survivor of the *Eagle* voyage. Squires, SS *Eagle* - *The Secret Mission, 1944-45*.

³¹ Senior Medical Officer, Falkland Islands, to Colonial Office, [n.d.], April 1945, CO 78/ 217/6, TNA. Marr was “an introvert and had trouble sharing his thoughts...he was a little bit over the hill,” A.Taylor, Transcript of interview with BAS archivist J. Rae, 14 October 1987, AD6/24/1/6.2, BAS.

³² Andrew Taylor, “Two Years Below Cape Horn,” unpub ms, 1948, Andrew Taylor Collection, Box 13, Folder 20, 142, UMAN, gives Taylor’s account. Cardinall, governor and commander-in-chief at the Falklands, offered Taylor the command appointment: Taylor collection, Box 8, Folder 16. Cardinall noted he would ask the secretary of state for the colonies about a salary increase. The offer of a bonus £150 a year is at Secretary of State for the Colonies to Governor, Falkland Islands, AD8/1/12(1), 16 February 1945, BAS.

³³ Examples are in D. Beeby, *In a Crystal Land, Canadian Explorers in Antarctica*, (Toronto, 1994).

appreciate them a little. I cannot see much to admire in a huge, desolate, ice-covered mountain peak, or in a sea coast faced with a sinister looking ice-cliff. To me, the handicraft of Man, in his creation of a beautiful piece of architecture or a fine-lined ship, is much more to be admired and is more pleasing to the eye. From all this, it will be plainly understood that I am not of that ilk from which polar heroes are built from, and truth to tell I have no desire to be.³⁴

Continuing through waters thick with brash ice and tabular icebergs populated by penguins and Weddell seals, *Eagle* arrived 12 February 1945 at Antarctic Sound and the entrance to Hope Bay. Separating the Joinville Islands from the northeast tip of the Antarctic Peninsula, the Sound was so named by Dr Otto Nordenskjöld, leader of the Swedish Antarctic Expedition, for his ship *Antarctic*. Commanded by the Norwegian whaler and polar explorer Captain Carl Anton Larsen, in 1902 it was the first ship to make the transit. *Eagle* and her crew were to become very familiar with this stretch of water, where “for the next couple of hours we had our hands full on the bridge, and our wheelsman Jack Murrins, had no need that morning at any rate to while away his trick in pleasant cogitation. A continuous barrage of ‘hard-a-port’ or ‘hard-a-starboard’ was hurled at him from the bridge as the ship manoeuvred round one berg only to be confronted with another.”³⁵

Having survived this “barrage” Jack Murrins got *Eagle* to her anchorage in what became known as Eagle Cove, whereupon Captain Taylor immediately took the opportunity to

express the appreciation and thanks of my party and myself for the splendid manner in which you [Sheppard], your officers and crew have brought us safely to our destination in the good ship *Eagle*. ...we deeply admire your own personal action in insisting upon continuing this voyage despite several broken ribs. We know that your decision at Deception Island not to go to hospital at Port Stanley with the *Fitzroy* has undoubtedly been the sole reason your mission has now been completed, and we shall not soon forget it!”³⁶

The Operation Tabarin party quickly went ashore to find a site for the hut, followed by Sheppard, the debilitated expedition carpenter Lewis “Chippy” Ashton³⁷ and botanist Dr Ian Mackenzie Lamb³⁸ to inspect the ruins of a stone shelter built in

³⁴ “Sound of Fury,” Box 12, folder 14, 3-3/4 [Sheppard].

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 3-13, [Sheppard].

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 3-16, [Sheppard].

³⁷ Lewis Ashton (1898-1956) was to die in his native Manchester “as a result of the dusty conditions in a flour mill in which he ended up working.” Taylor, interview transcript, BAS.

³⁸ Held in high personal and scientific esteem by both Sheppard and Taylor, Ivan Mackenzie Lamb underwent gender reassignment surgery in 1971, and as Elke Mackenzie supported herself by translating German botanical textbooks into English. She died 18 January 1990 from Lou Gehrig’s disease. G. Llano, “A. I. Mackenzie Lamb, D.Sc.(Elke Mackenzie), (1911-1990),” *The Bryologist*,

January 1903 by four of Nordenskjöld's men marooned there. Lamb arrived before Sheppard and Ashton, becoming the first to visit in the forty-two years since the castaways were rescued and the shelter abandoned.³⁹ Lamb described the site and what he, and later Sheppard and Ashton, saw, and collected artifacts for the British Museum.⁴⁰

The searchers returned to the *Eagle* with the news that the only suitable location was over a mile from the ship's anchorage. This gave Sheppard yet another problem, how to transfer four hundred tons of cargo across a mile of treacherous reef-strewn open water without appropriate boats? In another example of hasty planning, *Eagle* had been supplied with an old flat-bottomed scow at Port Stanley, but no means of towing it. Although Taylor had managed to bring a small motor boat, *Jeanery II*, with him from Port Lockroy, it could only be used in calm weather. To complicate matters further, the ten-foot tide range restricted unloading to high tide, and *Eagle* was often beset by icebergs calving from an adjacent glacier, and had to be moved frequently.

On the afternoon after arrival the crew went "shooting seal, a favourite port of Newfoundlanders, and in this instance one which would provide us with welcome dog food." The first scow-load of cargo went ashore 13 February,⁴¹ including corrugated iron sheets and wood framing for a coal shed and a temporary galley. Base D was officially opened on 15 February when radio contact was made with Port Stanley and the Union flag raised. Four large signs painted with the legend "British Crown Lands" were also erected at conspicuous places along the coast. The *Eagle* and her crew of long-suffering Newfoundlanders had done what the *Fitzroy* and *William Scoresby* could not, placed Great Britain permanently on the Antarctic mainland.

The cramped conditions aboard *Eagle* improved after some of the Operation Tabarin personnel moved ashore on 17 February and took up residence in "Uncle Tom's Cabin," the coal shed. Although the crew pitied them having to spend a year in the harsh Antarctic environment, they had no doubts about their ability to survive, since "many of them were trained Naval and Military men, hard and tough as steel, commandos really."⁴² That Captain Taylor earlier had to suggest tactfully that they refrain from broaching the shore party's limited supply of liquor did not seem to have affected their relationships. His promise that each would get a tot of rum at the end of a day's work probably also helped!⁴³ An extra-generous tot was also dished out

94:315-320.

³⁹ O. Nordenskjöld, *Antarctica- Two Years Amongst the Ice of the South Pole*, (London, 1905). The ruin (63° 24'S, 56° 59'W) is designated Historic Monument 39 under the Antarctic Treaty. See *List of Historic Sites and Monuments Approved by the Antarctic Treaty Consultative Committee*.

⁴⁰ I. Mackenzie Lamb, 1945. *Operation Tabarin. Report on the stone wintering hut of the Swedish Expedition, 1901-3 at Hope Bay*, 22 March 1945, Andrew Taylor Collection, Box 6, File 10, UMAN.

⁴¹ "Two Years Below the Horn," 149; "Sound of Fury," 3-17, [Sheppard].

⁴² "Sound of Fury," Box 12, Folder 24, 34.

⁴³ "Sound of Fury," Box 12, folder 15, 8a [Taylor]; Andrew Taylor collection, Box 11, folder 22, 31-32, UMAN.

to any man that fell into the water, the first to receive it being deck-hand Alex Shano after his dory capsized in the surf. As Sheppard wrote

Alex took to the water head first like a professional diving champion, and although he came to the surface was gasping and unable to speak, he had the presence of mind to hold his spectacles. As a matter of fact, some of the lads stated afterwards that his glasses were still in their proper position on his nose when he came up for air! However, he was soon fished out - for Alex is tough,- and it was no time before he was wending his way to the Tin Galley where Tom Berry, the expedition's Chief Steward, gave him dry clothing and the extra tot of hot grog for which he had qualified. When he returned on board around midnight I noticed that he had to adopt tactical measures to reach his objective, the fo'castle! I have often wondered since whether Tom Berry actually measured the tots for the lads, or if for politeness sake he passed the bottle. On not a few occasions, the boys arrived on board pretty well lubricated everywhere but in the legs. Captain Taylor's thoughtfulness in the matter was appreciated by all. In addition to the fact that the grog warmed them up after spending long hours in the boats during freezing weather, the goodwill thus established certainly expedited the landing of the cargo.⁴⁴

Although discharging proved difficult and dangerous, Sheppard estimated that it could be completed in six days. This did not happen, since bad weather stopped work on six days, only one high tide trip was possible on eight days, and only on four days could two high tide trips be made. Unfortunately for the crew, the bad weather usually developed when they were taking a loaded scow to the beach, necessitating it being unloading again after their enforced return to *Eagle*. Tots of navy rum soon made amends! It was not until 1 March that *Eagle* could leave for Deception Island to bring back more cargo.

This first visit of *Eagle* to Hope Bay had been enlivened by four events. One of six ten-pound cans of harpoon grenade powder salvaged from the whaling station on Deception Island exploded on 18 February, probably due to a stray cigarette end igniting residue left on the deck from a leaking one thrown overboard. Fortunately, the only casualties were two prized pails of Newfoundland salt beef! More excitement occurred the next day when *Eagle* narrowly missed being struck by a large iceberg calving from a nearby glacier. Although Sheppard took evasive action by swinging the ship on her anchor cables, two dories moored alongside were crushed. The shore party also survived a "nightmare" motor boat trip from *Eagle* to the shore a few days later "due to the grace of God and the skill of Bob Whitten."⁴⁵

But real concern did arise when a radio message from HMS *Pursuivant*, the Royal Navy communications establishment at Port Stanley, expressed doubts about

⁴⁴ "Sound of Fury," Box 12, folder 17, 5-4, [Sheppard].

⁴⁵ E.H.Back, Personal Antarctic Diary, G12/2/3, 1944-45, BAS.

the safety of those at Base B, Deception Island.⁴⁶ Scheduled transmissions had not been received for several days, leading to speculation that either the whaling station living quarters, aptly named “Bleak House,” had burned down with them inside, or they had drowned in the currents of Neptune’s Bellows, the entrance channel to Whalers Bay and the station. Sheppard was asked to take the *Eagle* back immediately and find out, a request which placed him in a dilemma since all of the Hope Bay supplies were not yet ashore, and the deteriorating weather and increasing ice cover might stop him returning to finish the task. Given the greater potential for loss of life at Hope Bay, he had no choice but to refuse. Instead, he suggested that *William Scoresby* abandon its mission to begin setting up Base C on the South Orkney Islands, and return to Deception Island. This was done, whereupon the party were found to be alive with a broken radio generator.

That Sheppard and his crew got *Eagle* into Hope Bay and put materials and men ashore did not go unrecognized by those in authority. Congratulatory messages were received from the Falkland Islands governor, Sir Alan W. Cardinall and Commander Martin, in command of the shore base HMS *Pursuivant*, also a planner of Operation Tabarin. Typically, Sheppard again turned the praise over to his crew, especially to Robert Whitten who he credited with being primarily responsible for their success. As for the crew of *Eagle*:

They were a fine lot of men - - not angels, of course, but what skipper would care to have angels on board; he’d mistrust them. The lads liked their grog, occasionally too a little too much, and sometimes became a little boisterous. Nevertheless, when there was work to be done they were on the job, and at sea no reasonable master could wish for better. As may be expected, they could also take care of themselves, and on a few occasions, only a few, during the voyage did I find it tactful in one or two ports, to become conveniently deaf, or close a discreet eye to a little “goings on.”⁴⁷

Eagle arrived back at Deception Island 2 March 1945 to collect further supplies brought from Port Stanley by *Fitzroy*, sixty tons of bagged coal from the whaling station, and more materials to be stored for Stonington. Most of the coal was to be used by *Eagle* to set up emergency sledging and surveying supply depots along the coast after unloading had finished. Subsequent events mitigated this. But the plan to have *Eagle* quickly leave Deception Island on her second trip to Hope Bay was thwarted by late season bad weather which confined her to Whalers Bay until 11 March. This delay greatly concerned Sheppard, who was well aware that Bransfield Strait and Antarctic Sound could soon become choked with autumn ice, making it difficult for *Eagle* to get into Hope Bay with its final load, or leave if it did! And as

⁴⁶ W. R. Flett, (base leader/geologist); Sgt G. Howkins, RNVR, (meteorologist), N. F. Layther (radio operator), C. Smith, Leading Cook, RN. See J. M. Wordie, “The Falkland Islands Dependencies Survey, 1943-1946,” *Polar Record*, 4(32): 372-84.

⁴⁷ “Sound of Fury,” Box 12, Folder 17, 5-26 [Sheppard].

they were making ready to leave Deception Island, three teeth were stripped off the starboard windlass, an event which was to have important consequences.

Unloading the eighty tons of cargo began as soon as *Eagle* got back to Hope Bay on 12 March. Sheppard hoped to complete the task in one week, then depart on the depot laying trip. The *William Scoresby* also arrived, bringing the Deception Island radio operator Thomas Donnachie, who was being exchanged for the more experienced Hope Bay incumbent J.E.B.F. Farrington⁴⁸ to ensure that the transmission breakdown with Port Stanley, and the concerns generated, did not reoccur. Soon after she left, the *Eagle* and her crew were confronted with the most serious and life-threatening crisis of their entire voyage.

St. Patrick's Day, normally a celebratory day for the Newfoundland crew, was about to become one they would not forget. *Eagle* dragged her anchors on the steep bottom of Hope Bay, and would not answer the helm as she drifted broadside into Antarctic Sound. Fortunately, the crew stopped her grounding on a small promontory by manually heaving in the starboard anchor, its windlass being inoperative. To make matters worse, a link then broke in the port anchor cable, and that anchor was lost along with seventy-five fathoms of chain. Squires the radio operator reported this to the shore parties:

Hello Tommy, Hello Tommy, Harold calling Tommy, Harold calling Tommy. I have a message for you. We are now out to sea. We are now out to sea. In the gale this morning, we were forced to cut the scow adrift to avoid damage to our rudder and propeller. We have also lost your small dinghy. We have lost our anchor and eighty fathoms of cable. We have drifted out to sea and are now in the lull of some land. We think we are to south'ard of you, but we do not know for sure. We have had two collisions with icebergs in the poor visibility, and have lost our bow and part of the foredeck. We cannot tell what the exact damage is, but we do not seem to be taking much water. That is all, Tommy. That is all. Over to you.⁴⁹

The gale continued to worsen, with freezing frost vapour and spume icing up the superstructure. Once again, by dint of superior seamanship, Sheppard and the crew regained control of their ship, this time stationing her in the lee of Joinville Island, the engine at dead slow to stop her drifting ashore. As Squires updated those at the base

Hello Tommy. Hello Tommy. Harold calling Tommy. Can you see us yet?
We are coming into Hope Bay again from the north. We are coming in now.

⁴⁸ Unlike other Operation Tabarin members, James Edward Butler Futtit "Fram" Farrington (1908-2002) was denied the Polar Medal (Silver, Antarctic clasp) during his lifetime because he did not overwinter on the Antarctic mainland, doing this instead on Deception Island after this move. A posthumous award (2003) added it to the Polar Medal (Bronze, Antarctic clasp, 1935-38) he received (1941) for previous time on the *William Scoresby*. This made him the eighteenth and last person to receive both the Polar Medal (Bronze) and the Polar Medal (Silver). G. Hattersley-Smith, 2003. Obituary, *Polar Record*, 39(10): 270-71; *London Gazette*, 4 April 2003.

⁴⁹ "Two Years Below the Horn," 172-73.

We cannot tell what our damage is without someone going over the side, which is impossible at present. However, it all seems to be above the water line, and we are not taking much water. We are not in any immediate danger. We are going in again to try and anchor. Over to you Tommy, over to you.⁵⁰

But the worst was still to come. As the command “stop engines” was rung down, a violent impact occurred accompanied by the sound of splintering wood. An iceberg unnoticed by those on the bridge in the poor visibility had collided with the bow, destroying the bowsprit, cutwater, and part of the stem. Although Sheppard brought *Eagle* astern and disengaged her, an unavoidable collision occurred with another which pushed in the remnants of the bow by ten feet. Fortunately for all, the visibility temporarily improved, making it possible for Capt. Sheppard to negotiate a way between the icebergs into open water. But severe damage had been done, and the bilge pumps could not cope with the water flooding into the engine room. Emergency pumps were rigged so that enough could be expelled to let *Eagle* answer the helm and return to Hope Bay. There, her now shortened port anchor cable parted again, and another message followed to those on shore

Hello Tommy, Hello Tommy, Harold calling Tommy. We are trying now to anchor in Eagle Cove, but it doesn't look as though we are going to make it. We are now steaming full ahead and still the anchor is dragging. Capt. Sheppard wants to know any information you can give him concerning a possible anchorage off your base. We are thinking of trying to anchor there. Over to you, Tommy, over to you.⁵¹

That *Eagle* did not sink after these impacts was largely because the hole in the bow had become plugged with compacted ice and debris. Nonetheless, the crew remained in grave danger with the gale still blowing, visibility at zero, the ship leaking badly, no anchors, and the impossibility of launching life boats. Sheppard decided that under those conditions his only option was to beach her,⁵² so Squires again radioed ashore “To Officer Commanding Base D, from Master *Eagle*. Ship now leaking badly and both anchors lost. With present weather conditions, thought of saving ship impossible. Have decided to beach *Eagle* in endeavour to save lives of crew. Can you have your men standing by in bight with lines to assist us?”⁵³

The shore party immediately left for the beach, but the storm suddenly abated and the pumps began to handle the water. After getting the agreement of his crew, Sheppard decided to make a dash for Port Stanley. Beaching *Eagle* and facing possible death, or being marooned at Hope Bay for the winter, were options that the crew definitely did not relish, so they quickly set about preparing the ship to leave despite one third of the base supplies remaining on board. The bow wreckage was

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 173.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 174

⁵² Base D to Naval Officer-in-Command, Falkland Islands, AD 8/1/10(4), 19 March 1945, BAS.

⁵³ “Sound of Fury,” Box 12, folder 20, 8-9&10, [Sheppard].

cleared, the hole temporarily repaired with canvas and sheepskins, and a course set for the Falkland Islands. Captain Taylor returned to the base and radioed HMS *Pursuivant* to have the *William Scoresby* rendezvous with *Eagle* and escort her into port, and as Surgeon Lieutenant Back observed "may God preserve the *Eagle* and her brave crew."⁵⁴ Taylor later recorded that

We waved goodbye to the *Eagle* and her men and good luck. She was making for the open sea in iceberg ridden waters and in the midst of a gale; her bow was gaping open and part of her foredeck was swept away; she had neither anchors nor windlass no windlass, and was none too well supplied with either water or fuel; her intrepid skipper had been in a physical condition for six weeks which would have kept many a sedentary worker confined to bed, her mate had been lost to her on the voyage south, and Bob Whitten had been filling two jobs by almost superhuman efforts; she had fought the wind, sea and ice, and still found time to land our cargo. She had made a proud voyage for all her grimy rough appearance. As she sailed away, with all the anxieties occupying so much of the crew's attention, they would not likely have seen the little host of four men on the rocks braced against the wind waving them 'Bon Voyage!' They could not have seen either the pride that we all felt in having had the *Eagle* and her crew working with and for us. We shall not soon forget the *Eagle* and her men. With the wind still screaming past us, we watched our snub-nosed little ship, her tarry sides white with frozen spray, bobbing her way out towards the sea until she disappeared behind the ice cliffs of Sheppard Point. We arrived back at base just in time to hear 'Sparks' weak signals apologizing for the *Eagle's* unexpected departure and hoping that they were not leaving us in difficulties through the loss of undelivered stores still aboard the ship, a message was typical of the consideration we had been shown at all times by the ship and her crew, though its receipt under these circumstances, at the outset of so dangerous a voyage made us feel very humble indeed.⁵⁵

A light was kept burning all night in the living hut to provide a bearing in case Sheppard was forced to return, and "listening to the thunderous roar of the wind and its tremendous gusts, we lay there sleeplessly thinking of our friends aboard the *Eagle* fighting for their lives on so wild a night."⁵⁶

The passage to safety was not without incident. High seas carried away the motor boat and two dories, and flooded the damaged forecabin and its occupants, making Sheppard heave-to for a day when it appeared that *Eagle* might founder. But careful seamanship brought her through, although the three-day voyage became seven. *William Scoresby* and *Eagle* met on 21 March 1945, and after another day hove-to

⁵⁴ Back, Personal Antarctic Diary, 17 March 1945.

⁵⁵ Taylor, "Two Years Below Cape Horn" 175-76.

⁵⁶ *Ibid*, 177.

they entered Port Stanley on 24 March 1945 to a waiting crowd, the culmination of “a magnificent effort”⁵⁷ by the master and crew of *Eagle*.

The next day, those at Hope Bay received the signal they had been anxiously waiting for when HMS *Pursuivant* informed them that “*Eagle* arrived a.m. today.” Taylor immediately radioed Sheppard to tell him that “All here greatly relieved to hear of your deservedly safe passage, the *Eagle* holds a high place in our regards.” In turn, Sheppard replied “Thank you for your [message]. Sorry having to leave you in such an unconventional manner, but take this opportunity to say good-bye and good luck to yourself and party. All hands feeling fine.”⁵⁸ As a final gesture, all those at Base D signed and sent a letter to Sheppard expressing their

very deep appreciation of the services performed...we would like in particular to record the way in which Capt. Sheppard, though suffering from a painful injury, brought his ship into an uncharted and storm ridden bay; how he persisted in landing a valuable cargo, though endangered by a treacherous anchorage, lashed by sudden storms and handicapped by inadequate landing facilities; how finally, with both cables parted in a gale and his ship’s bows stove in by ice in blinding snow, he succeeded in nursing her back safely to harbour, thereby preserving the lives of his crew.⁵⁹

A survey of *Eagle* done in Port Stanley on 26 March showed the extent of the damage as

Stem and false stem splintered and broken and hull plank ends thrust inboard. Wrought iron stem face plate broken. Both anchors and 170 feet of cable missing. Forecastle deck planking splintered and broken, deck stems and butts shaken and started. Bowsprit and cutwater with all fastenings carried away. Hull planking seams and butt shaken and started adjacent to the damage. Forecastle head nails and stanchions carried away. Anchor windlass main driving wheel teeth broken. Foremast shaken and stays carried away from their fastenings.⁶⁰

Most of this could not be rectified with the facilities at hand, so temporary repairs were made and the bow hole filled with concrete to allow *Eagle* to get to Montevideo for a full overhaul.

While waiting, Sheppard wrote two reports for Governor Cardinall. The first detailed the complete journey and the second described the almost fatal events of 17 March. For the latter, he reasoned that mooring the vessel some distance from the hut site significantly increased the discharging time, exposing his ship more than necessary to the approaching winter weather. This was also compounded by the late

⁵⁷ Back, Personal Antarctic Diary, 25 March 1945.

⁵⁸ Andrew Taylor Collection, Box 11, File 38, UMAN.

⁵⁹ Base D, Letter, 14 April 1945, Andrew Taylor Collection, Box 8, File 21, UMAN.

⁶⁰ J.M.Thomson, Lloyds Agency Survey of SS. *Eagle*, AD8/1/10 (4), 26 March 1945, BAS.

arrival at Port Stanley from Newfoundland. Taylor later took a more forceful stance, blaming the organizing committee in London for not providing *Eagle* with better boats to transfer the supplies ashore, since “dories and pleasure motor boats were not what were needed for that heavy job”.⁶¹ Mindful of the contribution made by his crew to the success of the voyage and the safe return to Port Stanley, Sheppard also took the opportunity to inform the governor that they were due significant overtime payments because of the extra unloading time!⁶²

After the damage was temporarily repaired, the *Eagle* left Port Stanley on 11 April and reached Montevideo on 17 April where she went on to dry-dock. The crew transferred into shore accommodation for some well-deserved relaxation time after the rigours of the voyage. On 24 June, prophetically St. John's Day in her home port, *Eagle* started for Newfoundland. But regrettably this part of her journey also did not go without incident. Fireman Nicholas Cullen died from a head injury received when loading coal in Rio de Janeiro, and was buried in Bahia. Following a stop at Georgetown, British Guiana (Guyana) to load timber (and perhaps rum?) and coal, the US Virgin Islands, and New York, *Eagle* arrived home on 2 October.

During almost twelve months away, she had covered 18,571 nautical miles in 123 days 9 hours at an average speed of 6.26 knots.⁶³ As Taylor wrote to Governor Cardinall,

It is well known how fine has been the response of the sturdy Newfoundlanders to our response for naval aid, and with the country bled white, seamen are not easy to come by...they did a marvellous job under extremely difficult conditions which would have driven most other ships to abandon us. [The] crew took enthusiastic interest in work and at no time made any trouble. Captain Sheppard's courteous cooperation, courage and determination left nothing to be desired, and is more commendable in light of his injured condition. First Officer Whitten deserves great credit for successful landing of stores in face of all but insuperable difficulties. Second engineer Power kept the cantankerous motor boat in operation without which landing would have been impossible... I feel that recognition of efforts are worthy of some tangible acknowledgment. Cool courage and tenacity of entire crew won our unstinted admiration.⁶⁴

The Colonial Office was similarly impressed, and asked the governor to consult with Taylor and advise on the suitability of *Eagle* for the 1945-46 season.⁶⁵ However, although Cardinall recognized that it was unlikely that the base at Hope Bay could have been established that year without her, he expressed the realistic view that in

⁶¹ Andrew Taylor Collection, Box 12, File 27, 13, [Taylor] UMAN.

⁶² Sheppard to Colonial Secretary, Falkland Islands, AD8/1/10 (4), 5 April 1945, BAS.

⁶³ Sheppard, *Antarctica*, VA10,#2,

⁶⁴ A.Taylor to, Naval-Officer-in-Charge, Falkland Islands, 26 April 1945, AD8/1/10 (4), BAS.

⁶⁵ Secretary of State for the Colonies to Governor, Falkland Islands, 16 February 1945, AD 8/1/12 (1), BAS.

addition to the damages received the venerable ship was “quite unsuitable for next season, heavy coal consumption, limited cargo space (necessitating using *Fitzroy* also), aged, constant repair, winches/equipment out of date... have led to great inconvenience and very nearly to disaster. The Dependencies need a suitable vessel that can fill all the needs and work independently.”⁶⁶

Although Operation Tabarin had its problems due to field conditions, poor planning, and the need to get personnel into Antarctica as rapidly as possible given Argentina’s bellicosity, it was important because it strengthened Britain’s sovereignty commitment to the Dependencies. The authorities were particularly fortunate that, despite the *Eagle*’s obvious unsuitability for the task, a group of hardened and ice-experienced men already known to each other in the close-knit maritime community of St. John’s, had been available. “A very independent lot of lads, not in the least afraid to express themselves should occasion arise,”⁶⁷ they were unperturbed by the conditions they faced. The high degree of mutual respect developed between them, the skipper, and the shore party also made for a harmonious working environment.

As the editor of the 21 June 1945 edition of the *Hope Bay Howler* observed

We shall never see *Eagle* again, we may not see Capt. Sheppard, but I think there are a few men who stood on a point who will always remember seeing a small wooden ship sail slowly by, her sides encrusted with ice, her bowsprit hanging in its gear and her clipper stern all crumpled, while their ears will ever hear a very ordinary young man’s voice as it said over the radio “we have almost given up hope, we have almost given up hope. The Captain is deciding whether to beach the ship or run for Stanley, whether to beach the ship or run for Stanley” and that same young man after giving this momentous news in a voice as emotional as a BBC announcer repeating fat-stock prices.⁶⁸

And as Captain Robert Carl Sheppard later wrote, “our generation of Newfoundlanders ‘who go down to the sea in ships...’ are well able to maintain the best traditions of our famous fore-bearers.”⁶⁹ And this the master and crew of the *Eagle* most certainly did.

⁶⁶ Governor, Falkland Islands, to Secretary of State for the Colonies, AD8/1/10 (4), 31 March 1945, BAS.

⁶⁷ “Sound of Fury,” Box 12, Folder 24, 58 [Sheppard].

⁶⁸ Probably edited by Eric Back, the newsletter was intended as a monthly publication of the “Hope Bay Publishing Co.,” containing anonymous contributions from each of the three bases. The cover page consisted of a coat-of-arms showing a loaded sledge, a seal peering through ice, and a pair of crossed sledging pennants over a bottle of Gordon’s Dry Gin. For this copy, see Scott Polar Research Institute, Cambridge, UK, MS 1308/22/1-11.

⁶⁹ Sheppard, “Apology,” Andrew Taylor Collection, Box 11, folder 27, UMAN.