

DRAMA IN REAL LIFE: "I Took James
Diplock on a tour of the St. Roch"

Of dogs

The Inuit brought 11 dogs with them on this voyage - the other 6 belonged to the RCMP.

The Inuit dogs were kept on the main deck, the RCMP dogs on the afterdeck.

According to Diplock, the only way to tell the difference between the two sets of animals, was that the Inuit dogs would bite you (he was bitten on two or three occasions going in or out of the fo'c'sle) while the RCMP dogs would merely growl at you.

And walrus (walrii?)

Pannipakkatuk was chiefly responsible for shooting the walrus and doing what minimal butchering was done on the animals (ie hack off a chunk and heave it to the dogs).

Diplock ate raw walrus, which he said tastes very good. He learned from the Inuit how to slice down through the hide and fat, and expose the meat/muscle which you then cut a strip of. The walrus were hauled aboard using the boom and a line run from the mast.

And fish

The men filled the lifeboat on the port side of the boatdeck with fillets of Arctic Char (the fish were so plentiful you kept only the best bits). You could dry bits of fish along the rail of the fairweather bridge, and it was 'as good as candy'.

The lifeboat and the launch

He couldn't recall these being used at all, as they were too heavy and unwieldy. There were two Newfoundland dories aboard (I believe he said one hung aft on the boatdeck while the other was kept on the main or foredeck, port side) which they used instead.

He only recalled the engine of the launch being fired up once (and I believe that wasn't even in the water).

Rock and roll

He vividly remembered the two or three days of rough weather they encountered off the Aleutians, where the crow's nest disappeared under the waves, and water poured through the galley smokestack and put the stove out. Diplock slept (when he had time) on the bench against the aft bulkhead of the mess, where he was snugly jammed in against the table. He'd just grab a can of whatever (he mentioned peaches) and eat the contents just like that.

They couldn't find Bill Cashin, Russil the wireless operator, or the cook for the duration of the storm. Cashin and Russil were discovered lying on a mattress on the floor of the wireless cabin completely and totally seasick. He didn't know where the cook had hidden out.

Or fine cuisine

The cook couldn't cook, whereas Russil was an excellent cook. They got him to do as much of the cooking as they could.

Dickens. Dickens threatened him with his gun. Diplock had an argument with
The mysterious rudderwell

The rudder could be lifted up through the rudderwell. He also said that the propeller had been changed three or four trips previous to this one, and that it

also was hauled up through the rudderwell (as he wasn't on that trip, he had this from another crewmember).

The battery room

As far as he understood it, the auxilliary generator in the workshop was used to charge the batteries, and then the ship's electrical power (lights, radio equipment, etc) was derived from those batteries (this reassured me about what I've been telling people - perhaps everyone else already took it as a given).

The fo'c'sle

He didn't recall ever spending much time down here, as he said they worked 4 hour shifts (4 on, 4 off) 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. It was somewhat hazardous getting back here, what with dogs, rough weather and all, so he often slept on that bench in the mess.

His bunk was the warmest in the fo'c'sle (of course). He wasn't very well acquainted with his wife-to-be at the time (despite the picture).

He thought there was some kind of toilet facility in the fo'c'sle, but he couldn't remember what. They just went over the rail half the time anyways.

Polar bear hide

The crew had a small hand operated meat grinder fastened to the hatch covering the rudderwell. Diplock said they put a 1500 lb polar bear, as well as a musk ox, through the grinder.

En generale

Henry Larsen was pretty well the only fellow who went up into the crow's nest. Heaving the lead was really only done in the western Arctic, particularly as they were rounding Point Barrow.

Although they encountered hurricane force winds entering Tuktoyukkatuk, the water was too shallow to allow waves more than five or six feet high.

He put his clothes on in Halifax and, except for his boots, didn't take them off again until the Aleutians. You stopped noticing the smell after awhile.

He believes there is a radio missing from the mess - it was about one and a half ft long by one foot high, made of metal (grey?) and inset into the starboard bulkhead in the area between the clock and speaker. It had a metal plate on it inscribed with something like 'From the Burrard Drydock Company'.

Someone on the tour asked him if the journey was fun. He replied 'I thought it was'. (He was never seasick on this trip).

Notes by Eric Kowalski
following James Diplock's
visit on March 28th,
1985.