

Obituaries

Walter A. Wood Jr, American surveyor and mountaineer, died at West Palm Beach, Florida, on 17 May 1993, aged 85. Private means and a rigorous training enabled him to exploit a love of mountains by organizing his own expeditions, principally to the Yukon Territory. He was a benefactor to Canada and an inspiration to the fortunate members of his field parties.

Walter Abbott Wood was born at Hoosik Falls, New York, in 1908. He qualified as a surveyor in Switzerland in the 1920s, at the same time gaining the diploma of an Alpine guide, a rare distinction for a non-Swiss.

In the summer of 1933 he took part as assistant surveyor in the Louise A. Boyd Expedition to East Greenland, in the region of Franz Joseph Fjord and Kong Oscars Fjord, where valuable survey, botanical, geological, and photographic work was carried out in the face of difficult sea-ice conditions. Miss Boyd, later describing her outward voyage to a lecture audience, said that she had been 'screwed in the ice for three days' after leaving Jan Mayen. Wood then had the unenviable task of warning this formidable lady that her remark could be misconstrued! The full results of the expedition appeared in a Special Publication of the American Geographical Society, in which Wood contributed to the photogrammetric section.

In the summers of 1935 and 1936, as a research associate of the American Geographical Society, Wood extended his pioneer work in photogrammetric mapping during expeditions that he organized and led to the little-known region between Kluane Lake, Yukon Territory, and the international boundary with Alaska. The region had not previously been photographed from the air. In the two seasons, Wood established ground control and arranged for air photography from light aircraft. He then used novel methods to produce a map of the region at the scale of 1:100,000 from about 650 mainly oblique air photographs. In August 1935, from his base at Burwash Landing at the northern end of Kluane Lake, he and three companions made the first ascent of Mount Steele (16,439 ft). The height that he determined for the mountain remains on maps today. In both seasons Wood was accompanied by his first wife, Foresta, who became an expert in field logistics. Before World War II, Wood also organized and led a survey and mountaineering expedition to the Sikkim Himalaya.

During the war, Wood served in the United States Army and, for the last year, as a military attaché in Ottawa at the rank of Colonel. In the late 1940s he took part as an observer in a long-range reconnaissance flight over the Arctic Ocean in an aircraft of the USAF Alaska Command. He became one of the first to recognize that the floating ice islands, designated T[arget] 1, 2, and 3, were detached pieces of ice shelves fringing the north coast of Ellesmere Island.

In the summers of 1948, 1949, and 1951, Wood organized and directed 'Project Snow Cornice' — for glaciological and geological research, survey, and mountaineering — in the St Elias Mountains on the Alaska–Yukon boundary. The project was mounted under the auspices of the Arctic Institute of North America, but was funded by Wood himself, a fact that he was at great pains to conceal. The rear base was at Yakutat on the Alaska coast, and the main field camp of Jamesway huts was sited on a nunatak near the head of the Upper Seward Glacier, beneath the south face of Mount Logan, with a subsidiary camp on the Malaspina Glacier. Important glaciological work in the three seasons was directed by Professor Robert P. Sharp.

In the summer of 1949 Wood arranged for a party of four to make the first ascent of Mount Vancouver (15,700 ft), which was then the highest unclimbed peak in Canada. Wood himself was slightly indisposed and did not take part, but all four men reached the summit, including 58-year-old Professor Noel Odell of Mount Everest fame. Disaster struck the 1951 expedition when Foresta Wood and her 17-year-old daughter Valerie were lost, with the veteran Alaska bush pilot Maurice King. In late July they were flying out in a ski-wheel, single-engine Norseman aircraft to Yakutat, after spending three weeks at the Upper Seward camp. At the time of the accident, Wood and two companions were on their way down from making the first ascent of Mount Hubbard (14,950 ft). No trace of the aircraft or its occupants were ever found, despite a month-long search by RCAF, USAF, and private aircraft. A probable sighting of the aircraft at the relevant time suggested that it came down in Yakutat Bay, but Wood himself preferred to believe that it came down in the mountains. He never went back to the Upper Seward Glacier.

In the early 1960s Wood returned to his old stamping ground on the northeast side of the St Elias Mountains and established a new field station near the southern end of Kluane Lake, again nominally under the auspices of the Arctic Institute of North America. From here, with light aircraft support, he continued the field research initiated on 'Project Snow Cornice' on the southwest side of the mountains, but with the introduction of a strong biological element. He thus assembled a valuable database that was a factor in helping the Canadian government decide to establish the Kluane National Park, in which Wood took great pleasure and a modest pride.

Wood was a fine field leader who ran his field camps with unobtrusive discipline and efficiency, and with the utmost regard for safety in all circumstances within his direct control. He was sometime president of both the American Geographical Society and the Explorers Club in

New York. By the first of his three marriages, he had a surviving son, Peter, who accompanied him on his post-war expeditions, and who later wrote a history of the International Glaciological Society.

Geoffrey Hattersley-Smith

Surgeon Captain Edward W. Bingham, the last surviving holder of a Polar Medal with three clasps, died on 1 September 1993, aged 92. Bingham spent almost a third of his professional career in the polar regions participating in three important expeditions.

Ted Bingham was born in Dungannon, County Tyrone, on 2 January 1901, the son of a well-known and respected headmaster of Dungannon Royal School. He graduated in medicine from Trinity College, Dublin, in 1926, having distinguished himself at both rugby and cricket. However, he wanted to travel and explore, and soon after joining the Royal Navy he was attracted by a call for a volunteer to go as medical officer with Gino Watkins' British Arctic Air Route Expedition (1930–31). He was thrilled to be accepted and given leave to go. During the following year he spent two months with Flight-Lieutenant N.H. D'Veith manning the meteorological station in the centre of the ice-cap at 8000 ft. Later in the year he joined Lawrence Wager and myself in an ice-cap journey to map the inland border of the east coast mountains and to attempt the ascent of Mount Forel. Bingham was no mountaineer, but he achieved mountaineering fame when the *Australian Times* (July 1931) stated that he and I had climbed Mount Forel for a wager! In the following year Wager actually reached the height of 28,000 ft on the north face of Mount Everest. This journey and those to and from the ice-cap station were made by dog sledge and gave Bingham an introduction to huskies and dog driving, which he was to develop extensively in later years to the advantage of many polar travellers.

In 1932 Bingham was appointed to the survey ship HMS *Challenger*, which was to carry out hydrographic surveys off the coast of Labrador. When *Challenger* returned at the end of the summer of 1933, Bingham stayed for the winter to help Captain Baker with the coast-line survey. This involved getting to know Labrador huskies and a different method of sledging.

While in Nain in north Labrador, Bingham received an offer to join John Rymill, who had been in Greenland with Watkins' expedition, on an Antarctic expedition. The Admiralty having approved his appointment, he sledged from Nain to south Labrador, from where he reached Britain in time to officially join the British Graham Land Expedition (BGLE), which sailed for Port Stanley in the autumn of 1934. The topographical object of the expedition was to extend the map of the west coast of the Antarctic Peninsula (then known as Graham Land), which Lincoln Ellsworth and Sir Hubert Wilkins had claimed was an archipelago separated from the continent by a series of ice-filled straits. The expedition worked from two bases, and the surveys were completed by mapping from the ship, extensive dog sledge journeys, and aerial recon-

naissance. The last major journey of the expedition, in late 1936, was made by Rymill and Bingham; they crossed Graham Land at 70° S, a survey that, when combined with the other major journeys, finally confirmed the peninsularity of Graham Land.

Several of the sledging journeys used four or five sledges, each with a team of seven or nine dogs. This meant a lot of training and caring for the dogs — at one time there were more than 100 at the base — which was capably carried out by Bingham. He loved his dogs and put an immense amount of work into their training and welfare. He became a very experienced dog driver, a skill that was invaluable to him when he was appointed to command the newly created Falkland Islands Dependencies Survey (FIDS) in 1945.

FIDS was created to continue and expand the work of a small wartime security expedition that had operated in the northern part of the Antarctic Peninsula. It was an immense task for Bingham to organise the stores and equipment for the domestic and scientific requirements, not to mention arranging for dogs to be purchased and transported from Labrador in the immediate postwar conditions. How it was achieved is summarised in a quotation from Sir Vivian Fuchs' book *Of ice and men*: 'Bingham...used his knowledge of how the Services worked to pressurize or cajole shocked and reluctant naval storekeepers into giving him what was needed without wasting time going through the normal channels — frequently without the blessing of official sanction. If he was the bane of the authorities, his name soon began to be used as a threat in the naval victualling department, for the Commander always wanted everything "by this evening please," and was no respecter of regulations which he delighted in ignoring' (page 56).

In addition to organising the entire venture, Bingham had a leadership problem different than any that he had previously experienced. On earlier expeditions, he and his colleagues had progressed together, learning as they went along. Now he was the only one with any extensive polar experience, and most of his new companions were not only new to the Antarctic, but were ex-service personnel who had held commissioned rank and were accustomed to exercising leadership. However, in 18 months, Bingham completed his task admirably, and in 1947 he was appointed OBE and given a third clasp to his Polar medal. He also was awarded the Murchison Grant by the Royal Geographical Society.

From 1948 until 1952 Bingham was principal medical officer at the Royal Naval Air Station at Eglinton (near Londonderry) and was promoted captain in 1951. He then served as fleet medical officer on HMS *Vanguard*, Mountbatten's flag ship in the Mediterranean command. His final appointment was as principal medical officer at the Royal Naval Air Station at Lee-on-Solent. He retired from the Navy in 1957.

Bingham was a loveable Ulsterman, and during the 35 years of his retirement my wife and I kept in constant touch

with Bingham and his wife Constance, who died in 1990. He was very knowledgeable about roses and had always been keen to have a rose garden in his retirement. In Halstock he achieved this together with a large vegetable garden and a paddock where he kept his donkeys. It was always interesting to watch, and particularly to listen, whilst Ted and Con urged and pushed the recalcitrant beasts into a trailer — sometimes withdrawing defeated.

Ted was also a very keen angler, and whilst he was working at Chapel-Allerton Hospital near Leeds (1957–1962), he spent many happy hours fishing in the Yorkshire Dales. Constance unstintingly supported him by watching patiently and then returning in the evening to cook the day's catch. I spoke to Ted on the phone two days before he died, after one of his much-loved Halstock Horticultural Shows, and he enjoyed recounting the details of it. In conclusion, I cannot do better than to quote from the address given at his funeral by Rear Admiral A.R. Rawbone: 'As Ted's many friends will know, some two and a half years ago Ted was convalescing in a local nursing home recovering from a stroke that affected his right arm and side. He was comfortable and well looked after. At Ted's age it was suggested that it might be wise to stay there. This idea met short shrift from Ted! He did not wish to remain with those "old people." Fiercely independent, still young at heart, he was determined to look after himself and to live amongst his many friends in the village as long as it was possible to do so. As it happened, he was able to live out his last years just as he would have wished, and I am sure that he died a happy and contented man.'

Alfred Stephenson

Those who knew Ted Bingham each have special memories of him. There are three aspects of the man that stand out in particular to me. Anyone who served on convoy duty in northern and Russian waters prior to 1943 will recall the utter inadequacy of the protective cold-weather clothing available for watchkeepers and lookouts in HM ships. Those were the days when ship bridges were uncovered, and lookouts had to be in the open, as radar was in its infancy. Heavy-duty bridge coats were standard issue unless the new duffel coats were available or some US Navy sailor had been persuaded to swop his jacket. Then, in late 1943, a miracle seemed to happen: windproof pull-on jackets with separate heavy blanket liners became standard issue.

It was only in recent years, in conversation with Bingham, that I heard how it had happened. Bingham's first sea-going appointment in the war was in late 1942 to HMS *Duke of York*, then attached to the Home Fleet on Russian convoy duties. As Medical Officer, he was constructively critical of the inadequacy of issue cold-weather clothing. He had very definite ideas about what should be done, and he no doubt made his views very clear. In the summer of 1943 he was relieved of medical duties and seconded to the Ministry of Supply for three months to do something about the clothing. I don't think that the MOS can have known what hit them. Bingham discovered the newly developed windproof material 'Ventile,' and he

bullied the manufacturers into starting proper production. He visited blanket makers and persuaded them that only 'Hudson Bay' standards were acceptable. He gave talks to clothing factory workers about the problems of keeping warm in the Arctic and encouraged their efforts. He never took 'no' for an answer, and he returned in the autumn to the Home Fleet with complete issue of efficient cold-weather clothing. They were simple, strangely reminiscent of the garments used by the Inuit of East Greenland, with peaked hoods and simple drawstrings. There is a saying 'that the impossible takes time and miracles take slightly longer.' For those of us who served in the far north, and who offered thanks to the person who thought up these strange garments, Ted Bingham's work was a miracle that only took three months.

After the war, from the start at FIDS Base E, at Stonington Island, Bingham was a man in a hurry. He knew that in 11 months he had to pass all of his years of experience to the motley collection of base members who, under the problems of secrecy, he had brought together. We were matured by a war that had forced us into situations of leadership unusual for people of our age. In short, we were people with minds of our own. I think that Bingham's view was that if he could train us in things polar to the pattern developed by the British Graham Land Expedition, we would bring modifications based on our own developing experience. He was a hard taskmaster who, despite being nearly twice our average age, always did more than his share of any work that was in hand.

Bingham wanted to introduce ideas that were markedly different from those he inherited from Operation Tabarin: huts were to be open plan; no specialist cooks were carried at bases D and E; specialists of any sort were expected to take part in all parts of base life; and everyone had to be competent to live and survive in the field. All the specialist field equipment, such as tents, sledges, sleeping bags, and rations, had been chosen and ordered by Bingham. We were the first expedition, for instance, to use Ventile tents, and they have changed little to this day.

Bingham had his personal hates — notably skis — and we had the best selection of proper snowshoes that ever went south. His hate for skis was never quite understandable, for to us they represented great safety on glaciers. On one occasion when we were on a 5000-foot plateau, he persuaded, no, ordered, me to leave my precious ex-BGLE ski as a depot marker, and to return to base with only one!

At base, he took part in everything, including his share of the cooking. Friday nights, when the cooks changed, was party night, and, as we had no personal alcohol in that first year, we established a tradition that the cook had to pour out the bottle of spirits without retracing his steps down the glasses, and then to take the smallest dram himself. Under Bingham we kept a very clean and orderly hut, so that we could enjoy the contrast between base life and the relative squalor of life in the field. This was so effective that when Finn Ronne arrived in 1947 he reported that we could not possibly have been in our hut for a year, because it was too clean.

As base leader, Bingham was restless and never liked to see people sitting around when there was work that he knew needed to be done. He had his own method for stirring us into action, and each of us developed his own technique for not being found idle. He set high standards from the start, and it was a tribute to him that by tradition Stonington was always a very happy, hard-working, and popular base. My guess is that Bingham's year at Base E was not altogether easy. The BGLE had been basically a bunch of friends who had cut their teeth together in Greenland. For us, in 1946, he was senior in age, rank, and experience, and he found it difficult not to be dogmatic when expressing opinions. My hope was that in retrospect he found it a genuinely happy year. I speak for all of us when I say that we were proud to have served under and alongside him.

I do not suppose that 'how I should like to be remembered' ever passed through Bingham's mind, but if it had, I suspect that it would have been as a dog driver. In 1945 Robbie Slessor had been given the job of buying the expedition dogs in Labrador. When we met up with them running loose at the quarantine station in Stanley, they appeared a very motley collection, but Bingham seemed satisfied. Once we had reached Stonington, he made it clear that the combination of a badly trained dog team and an incompetent driver was lethal in the polar regions. Until he was satisfied with our standard of driving, there would be no field travel. Largely for safety reasons, he expected dogs to be driven from behind and never led, as the Americans tended to do. He expected them to be steered as accurately as a London taxi, and he controlled them almost entirely by his voice. Bingham taught us how to use the 40-foot Labrador whips — used to direct rather than to chastise — so necessary in his style of dog training. By example he gave us the confidence to handle our own teams.

The annual freeze-up was delayed in 1946, so that we had to wait four months before the sea ice was strong enough for us to drive the four miles to the old BGLE Debenham Island base abandoned by Penola in 1937. Here we picked up sledging artefacts such as old walrus-hide dog traces first used in Greenland and a hard runner sledge that proved invaluable in gathering seal carcasses on sea ice. From the start we were taught to drive our teams using the BGLE extended fan, and no other system was allowed. After six months, five of us had our own teams and were responsible for their welfare. Each of us felt that, apart from Bingham's Darkie, he had the best team leader, and there was always plenty of good-natured competition, which was part of the delight of dog driving.

My last trip with Bingham was the one I remember most. We were on a reconnaissance trip over to Square Bay. We had been pinned down at 4000 feet by a gale that

had clocked more than 100 knots at Base E 17 miles away, and we came out of the tents to a cloudless day to find three-foot high sastrugi that obviously continued parallel to our track all the way to Stonington. Bingham set out at a full gallop, bouncing his sledge over the rough snow, lunging against it at one moment as it balanced momentarily on a ridge, then giving it a deft flick on the handlebars as it nosed down into the hollow beyond without turning over. My diary records the sheer delight of that particular journey: 'EWB was in great form on the drive back from Windy camp. His sledge never overturned and he was a bit intolerant of our unsuccessful attempt to keep up with him. It showed us what relative amateurs we still are when it comes to sledge handling.'

Bingham had an uncanny empathy with dogs. At Halstock, only a month before he died, we were talking about his all-time favourite lead dog, Darkie. Ted had singled him out early on when the dogs were in quarantine: not large for a husky, with a broken ear due to earlier fights in Labrador, but undoubtedly a leader and the boss of all the others. He became the team leader that we used to teach all our other team leaders. In many ways it was this Bingham/Darkie combination that set the high standard of dog driving that was the tradition at Base E from 1946 until the dogs were phased out in 1976. Dougie Mason inherited Bingham's team for his long summer journey with the Americans on the east coast in 1947, and he told me later that Darkie was not in the lead for only 23 of the 1000 miles. Bunny Fuchs took this splendid team over for the two years after we left.

For Ted, leaving his team must have been a great personal wrench. There was a certain finality to such goodbyes, an acknowledgement that being able to get out of the base hut at moments of personal crisis and talk to the dogs was the catalyst that made Stonington base life so successful.

Darkie was brought back to Britain in 1950 for honourable retirement after something more than 4000 miles on journeys away from base. In 1993, only a month before he died, Bingham was talking about Darkie as the best lead dog he had ever trained. He sadly remarked that it was years after Darkie had died that he heard about his retirement in the UK. 'I would have liked to have met up with the old boy again,' he said, 'just to say thank for all he taught me.'

It is time — indeed, it may already be too late — that the full history of the dogs, dog drivers, and the journeys they achieved with FIDS and BAS is written. Maybe, if such a history is written, a proper acknowledgement — long overdue — will be made to the person who set the standard for the dog driving tradition that gave so much delight and pleasure to so many of us in the years that followed.

Kevin Walton