



THE SPIRIT OF ANARE

by Syd Kirkby

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*We were dreamers, dreaming greatly,
In the man stifled town;
We yearned beyond the skyline
Where the strange roads go down.*

Song of the Dead (Rudyard Kipling)

I first wintered at an ANARE station in 1956; I last wintered at an ANARE station (Mawson, and still the best) in 1980 after a twenty-year break. Despite what I had been told to expect, the 1980 winterers were the same sort of people as the 1956 ones. I last spent a little time on an ANARE station in January 1997 and I recognised those expeditioners as the same sort of people I lived and worked with 40 years before. I hope they recognised me as one of them.

Phil Barnaart recently greeted me with warm cordiality when I dropped in from a tourist ship to visit Macquarie Island and gave very generously of his time to show me around and introduce me to his party. They even extended to me the privilege of having lunch in their mess. Phil Law periodically writes to me and sends me a book he thinks I might enjoy and extends his hospitality whenever we are in Melbourne. A couple of days ago I had a phone call from Bob Jones, Station Leader at Mawson, and despite the fact that we had never met, we enjoyed a rambling yarn about things Antarctic. With the great majority, even those unmet, I feel a fellowship based on common experiences and the values and attitudes that grow out of them. Despite the fact that mostly my contacts with fellow Antarcticans are all too infrequent I believe there is a real bond between us across time and distance.

I think the bond is the spirit of ANARE, the fellowship of expeditioners. Although many, most, of us have never met we know something of each other. (For the benefit of non-expeditioners who may read this I will say that, of course, our "fellowship" is genderless; expeditioners will know that without having to see it written).

The spirit is there because we shared the wondrous glory of it all; the heave and swell and crash of the Southern Ocean, the roller coaster ride as the ship falls off the top of a swell and buries its nose and half its foredeck into a steel-grey ocean and, even though we know she will rise out of it, holding our breath until she does; the mist and leaden skies and the smiling sunny days; Macquarie Island looming out of rain with its great fields of kelp and surf and richness of wildlife; the first iceberg we ever saw; Big Ben on Heard Island with its muffler of cloud around its throat and its glaciers hanging off its sides; the sight of the continental cliffs rising from the sea; the unforgettable noise of a ship working ice, the shudder and grind of it and the backing and charging, and Hans Christian dinking a little nudge here and a push there and the floe opening; the exquisite colours of blue ice cliffs and crevasses and pack ice below the water and the inexpressible serenity of ghosting along in a dead calm pool among the pack; the raucous challenges of Adelies and the stately bearing of Emperors; the sudden explosive "whoosh" of a killer whale blowing beside the ship or, more excitingly beside us in a small dinghy; the freezing spray being torn off the water to lash the shore and anyone or anything out in it; the first autumn snow fall commencing to soften and mantle the station and the first pancakes of sea-ice forming on the harbour; the station with full winter snow drifts built up and the steady burble of power house engines drifting up against the wind on quieter days; Mt Henderson and the rest of the friendly sign-post-in-the-sky Framnes Mountains backdropping Mawson Rock and letting you know as you headed home – "this is the place".

Not all of us knew all of its aspects but we each knew enough personally, and knew enough of other aspects by account, to have it as a shared experience. Even more, the spirit is there because we each know that fellow expeditioners, like oneself, have been where the spirit is born, that they have seen and done the same sort of things and must have many of the same values. We are fortunate enough to have had opportunities to step outside mere personal interest and by contributing to a bigger undertaking to reap a bigger reward. We have had the chance to transcend our ideas of our normal capabilities and be a bit more committed, a bit less selfish, a bit more diligent and capable and stalwart and inventive and compassionate and versatile and determined and to the surprise, I'm sure, of many of us we mostly took those chances and lifted our game. And because we committed ourselves to the dream we share in the realisation of the dream. We can all take real pleasure in not only our own achievements but also those of our fellows and we can be proud of being part of the fellowship. I only know a small fraction of the inspirational stuff, of course, so you must all fill in your own experiences here. It feels good to look at what Phil Barnaart and his party are doing on Macquarie today; I get a real kick out of the achievements of the Vostok traverse; or the sledgers in 1961 so matter-of-factly pushing across the Fisher Glacier and climbing Mount Menzies; or the four Amery Ice Shelf troglodytes emerging from their winter under the snow to do great strokes on the glaciology survey; or the saga of Scullin Monolith in 1954; or the magnificent Lambert Glacier traverse (was there ever an endeavour so underacknowledged?); Sandercock's heroic but ultimately doomed attempts to save the Beaver aircraft from destruction during a blizzard by flying it virtually on the edge of Jim ground on its tie-downs; the miners creating the cosray vault at Mawson. And countless others. The more I think of it the more reasons for pride in ANARE stretch before me.

We had, too, the inspiration and sheer darn pleasure of knowing such a great bunch of people. Immediately into my mind flash things like the wisdom and shrewdness of the late great Jim McCarthy which he shared so generously with a brash and "uncouth youth" fellow expeditioner for no reason other than that his own code required him to help where he could; the never-say-die determination of Diana Patterson to be Station Leader; George Smith of dulcet tones and kindly manner. The only way I know to get under the old coot's skin is to say something complimentary about him and I'm not about to let a chance go by. Never mind the fact that he was almost unbelievably good at his primary job of getting, packing, listing, transporting and loading every item for every station and in his spare moments overseeing hut prefabrication and riding herd on a mob of expeditioner "helpers". Who can forget his eagerness to devote unlimited time and goodwill to ensuring the perfect cut and fit of each expeditioner's clothing and his generous guidance in matters of style. "Gedout Ya @#\$%&*\$, yer bloody deformed".

We knew Phil Law and his boundless enthusiasm, leadership and dash (not without its "burr under the saddle" quality at times!) that drew us on to greater things than we knew we were capable of; Lem Macey with his calm matter of fact authority; Peter Shaw's whimsical wit; Dick Thompson and his "Wakey, Wakey, DUKW in five" – absolutely the only thing that saved him from being bludgeoned to death by enraged sleepers was our admiration for his drive and competence and loyalty and a liking no self-respecting expeditioner would ever admit at the time; all the people over the years who worked in the Division's office and toiled so hard, so cheerfully and so well because, they too, were essential parts of the expeditions. It seemed to me there was very little of "them and us".

How many great ANARE colleagues have we each been proud to know over the years? – probably hundreds.

Above all there were the people with whom we wintered and humped briquettes, or rolled fuel drums, or worked on our backs in drifting snow and cold under Weasels or tractors miles away from base, or flew with, heart in mouth, or were half drowned by freezing spray on DUKWS or small boats battling to make landings, or bullocked a sledge, or struggled up mountains, or revelled in a wild and violent game of "football" (no ball needed for this one) in the mess on a ding night, or shared reverence at the beauty of Maya Plisetskaya's dancing in the Russian film of Swan Lake, (do you remember the collective intake of breath and the murmured "Oh God" or similar from the audience when she completed the seduction of Siegfred in Act 37; never mind the beauty, this one was damn erotic!), or sat in a tent, week after week, in companionable silence, or shared dreams of love and life "when we get back'

*Lo, some we loved, the loveliest and best
That time and fate of all their vintage pressed
Have drunk their cup a round or two before
And one by one crept silently to rest*

I think, too most of us take a good deal of Australian pleasure from the fact that all the external trappings of rank or authority and pre-existing notions of importance amount to nothing at all in the ultimate elitist atmosphere of an ANARE party. Every single member has to earn his or her own place by effort and ability. The elite are the best expeditioners regardless of their job or status outside, or wealth or charm and they are quickly recognised. Never enviously or grudgingly but warmly and freely. The best expeditioners get to be that way through qualities we can all aspire to.

How competent they are, how diligent, how helpful, how adaptable, how loyal, how courageous, how steadfast, how tolerant, how good humoured and good willed, how committed to the broad success of the expedition.

Every one of us has such memories. Good God! It would be astounding if we did not have a grand uniting spirit. Roam with me through some of my memories and recall your own and reflect on our boundless good fortune to have had the opportunity to look full on the face of our God, whatever its nature. To climb a mountain peak and look out on unmapped, untouched and often unknown mountains extending as far as the eye can see; to share the excitement of a geologist mate at the discovery of the first fossils in an area; to see, for the first time, the beauty of Beaver Lake and to sit on its edge, warm and sun drenched, eating chocolate; to see, for the first time, and with awe, the mighty Lambert Glacier and its tributaries; to see "diamond dust", where the air is full of microscopic ice crystals and looking into the sun the air seems crystal clear, yet look down sun and your whole view is full of the sparkle of myriad diamond points as the sun reflects from the suspended ice crystals; solar haloes and pillars, mock suns and sun bows, and the "green flash" as the below horizon sun throws a fleeting emerald green fire into the sky (for those who know John Manning, this is not to be confused with the blue streak though you need to be just about equally observant to get a decent sighting of either). The full moon setting over Casey Range, or the sun rising over mountains on a cold, clear, calm dawn after days of blizzard. The aurora with its infinite subtle variations of colour and shape and movement, and the brilliant stars shining through the paler draperies of the display. The pure physical pleasure of being very, very fit and running 30 or 40 or 50, indeed, on one occasion, 123 kilometres, in a day beside a top notch, eager and heroic dog team; calm cold days on the sea-ice in autumn or spring with men and dogs surrounded by their little clouds of breath vapour. The eager howls and "look at me", "look at me" of the dogs who are brother expeditioners.

And what comrades we had, imagine; two men, a diesel engineer and a radio technician, confined to two tiny vehicles that could go no further because of the severity of crevassing, 400 kilometres from Mawson, nothing to do but wait there for weeks on end while three others go off dog sledging so a damn fool surveyor and a damn fool geologist can pursue their projects. All the while the Dieso knows this is no place for rational beings to be with such clarity that he forms the first article of the Diesos' creed – "If you can see mountains, you are too damn close."

Returning after months in the field to be met by all from the base party who could leave their work and who had walked out miles on the plateau to greet us and help us over the last leg home.

A reunion 40 years on of the surviving members of the party, many of whom had not seen each other for years, in some cases literally not since stepping off the ship on returning home, and yet within half an hour or so we have slipped back into that easy, warm comradeship that is an amalgam of mutual dependence, trust, respect and warm affection.

There were things too, that must have been not so much fun at the time but which time and distance have mellowed. Things such as a ten-day blizzard while sledging and the wind breaking the upwind poles on the tent – the only time I have ever seen one of those wonderful polar pyramid tents significantly damaged – and lashing several cane marker poles around each broken tent pole and then crouching in our sleeping bags for a couple of days with our backs braced hard up against the

rebuilt poles to support them against the wind. Wind that screamed and howled and blasted the tent, a seriously big wind.

A big wind that tore a Beaver aircraft to pieces around its tie downs but couldn't tear a DC3 apart so it snapped the tie downs instead – they were three seven tonne and two ten tonne breaking strain cables – and then blew the aircraft about twelve kilometres. I went back to that location twenty years later and found the entire side of a caravan that had been destroyed in the blow, still pressure formed onto a sheer rock face, half a kilometre or so downwind from where it had been torn apart. Another big wind!

600 kilometres inland from Mawson with a D4 tractor sitting near vertically in a crevasse, nose down, precariously held five metres below the surface above a great void with the situation made somewhat more piquant by the fact that the other tractor with us was also slotted, though not so seriously, days of work to extract it by manpower. Good for a bit of a chuckle these days, whenever we get together; good, at any time, for a warm gratitude for the sort of blokes I worked with over the years.

I remember unloading the ship in marginal weather conditions at Mawson, the wind blowing hard and tearing freezing spray off the sea to coat everyone and everything on the DUKWS in ice armour, the conscious election to go over the side of the DUKW and into the water as a sling load of timber or piping or drums looked like getting out of control overhead. The instant of immersion is not too bad at all, but a second or two later, oh my God, it's cold. And there are things, too, which remain to this day, 20, 30, 40 years on, as sharply etched and as poignant or as frightening or as hat stamping, hair tearing frustrating and enraging as when they occurred.

If I open my mind to it, I can again be attempting an outlanding in a Beaver aircraft near Leckie Range in turbulent conditions. The pilot feeling his way closer and closer to the ground on successive passes until finally declaring conditions too bad to land. Begging and bullying him to have another try, this survey station was very important to us, and him making another attempt. The aircraft about two metres above the ground with the wing 30 or 40 degrees down on the pilot's side and thinking "My God, he's really taking a close look at the ground this time". A murmured "Up! Come up" from the pilot and looking at the controls and realising he had full opposite aileron on and the downside wing was stalled and that we were an instant off hitting the ground and near certain death. The miraculous wind gust that picked up the wing on the instant and let us climb away and head for home, both of us too shaken to say a word for half an hour or so, and not speaking of the incident, even to each other, for weeks after.

Also as sharp as ever is the utter heartache of watching a loving, hardworking, gentle old sledge dog becoming progressively more exhausted over a journey until he could no longer pull in his trace, then letting him run loose in the hope that he would be able to get some rest and just keep up with us for a day or two and regain his strength, looking back to see him hundreds of metres behind, alone, staggering and falling and rising and struggling on a few more metres and falling again. Walking back to him and looking into his lovely gentle old brown eyes and seeing the feeble wag of his tail as he saw his old mate coming back to help him. Placing a pistol muzzle against his head and shooting him.

*I have eaten your bread and salt,
I have drunk your water and wine,*

*The deaths ye died I have watched beside,
And the lives ye led were mine*

Departmental Ditties (Rudyard Kipling)

So, I have been privileged over the years to eat the bread and salt and drink the water and wine of my geologist and glaciologist and Dieso and radio operator and Met man and physicist and doctor and OIC and every other sort of expeditioner comrades and I offer them all my heartfelt thanks for their companionship, their help, their inspiration, their qualities that made them what they are. I thank them not only for their unstinting and cheerful help to carry scores of kilos of awkward survey equipment up onto mountain tops through the dangerous bits, and for the endless hours they cheerfully sat, wracked with cold, on wind-torn mountain tops checking time signals, reading thermometers and barometers and recording figures while I had my relatively great fun pointing my theodolite and plotting features and doing sums, even claiming to see stars in full daylight.

I thank them also, because I pretty much never knew one who wouldn't go the extra mile, or toil the extra hour with whole heart and good will for the general good and I could always look at them and feel that if I was accepted in such company then, despite my misgivings, I had probably earned it and by God, I'd better do my damndest to merit their continued acceptance. Why do they do it? It certainly doesn't gain them material wealth, it doesn't even gain them particular respect or stature in the broader community. I think that they do it because they are indeed the best sort of "dreamers, dreaming greatly".

It is a good place to have been, the source of this spirit, and I think we are all changed and a little bit ennobled by it. May it stay with us all of our lives.

Syd Kirkby, February 1997.