

NEWS CONFERENCE

WITH COMMANDER W. R. ANDERSON
COMMANDING OFFICER, U.S.S. NAUTILUS

NORTHWEST PASSAGE MISSION

AUGUST 8, 1958

P. M. -- 1:45 -- E.D.S.T.

FRIDAY

HELD IN THE CONFERENCE ROOM
THE WHITE HOUSE

MR. HAGERTY: Several things, before we start.

Since July 22nd, the NAUTILUS has been engaged in an exercise known as NORTHWEST PASSAGE. The NAUTILUS left Pearl Harbor -- July 23 and, after traversing the Bering Straits, the North Pole and the Ice Cap, signaled to us completion of its mission of going through, for the first time in history, a new passage between the Pacific and Atlantic Oceans.

Present today is the Commander of that ship, Commander Anderson. There will be two parts to this ceremony today. There will be a Presidential Citation to the Commander and a Presidential Unit Citation to the officers and men of the Submarine. Following that, the Commander will give you an outline of the trip, what happened, what he found, how his mission was accomplished.

The Commander was taken off the ship by helicopter from Iceland last night and was flown here today. He arrived here today at Noon and is presently with the President.

Q. What's his first name?

MR. HAGERTY: W. R.

Q. Where is he from?

MR. HAGERTY: He's from Tennessee -- I'll find out the rest for you. Here are copies of the Citations. He has also prepared a short fact sheet which will give you the direction of the travel and the like.

This mission opens up, as both Citations will show, the possibility of a new commercial sea lane under the ice by nuclear-powered cargo submarines. It cuts down the distance -- and there will be a map which we will put up here shortly -- between the two oceans markedly. For instance, from London to Tokyo at the present time, by nautical miles, it's a distance of 11,200 miles by the shortest present route through the Panama Canal. Across the North Pole that route is only 6,300 miles.

We are operating under the usual White House rules here, nobody leaves until this press conference ends.

Q. Jim, would you say what that route was from Pearl Harbor to ---

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MR. HAGERTY: Yes, it was from Pearl Harbor through one of the Straits -- I don't know the name of it -- of the Aleutian Islands, through the Bering Strait, up past Point Barrow, through the Ice Cap, and out into the sea off Greenland.

Q. Is this known as Operation Ice Cap?

MR. HAGERTY: Northwest Passage. You can see the distances in miles there -- I said 11,200 London to Tokyo. 6,300 via the Pole. Saving 4,900 miles. These white lines on this map are the existing commercial lanes. This dotted line is the route the ship actually took so that we could pick up the Skipper -- (indicating on the map) -- by helicopter last night and then fly him in today. And I will bring him in, in a few minutes.

This new distance is 6,700 miles. The old distance was 9,500 miles.

Q. From where to where?

MR. HAGERTY: Honolulu to the British Isles.

The Secretary of the Navy will be here, and some of our Admirals. And John McCone, and Lewis Strauss. I will have them come in, and then the President will bring the Commander in.

Mrs. Anderson also. She was flown down from New London last night. She did not know why.

On board the ship last night, or after they passed the Pole, the ship's printing press and the Captain got up some factual things on the NAUTILUS. I regret that I have only 20 copies, that's all they have printed and I will give these to the wire men and the networks, to the men normally assigned to cover here.

In that fact sheet the Captain has got quite a lot of interesting facts on this trip. Also I would like to talk later to the networks. He did tape some stuff on board the ship, on the reading of orders and other things -- sonar soundings, and so on.

(At 1:58 p.m., the President came in with Commander Anderson, and Captain Aurand read both Citations)

THE PRESIDENT: (To the Commander, on the first Citation) It's been a long time since I've had such a pleasant privilege. My very, very best congratulations.

(To the Commander, on the second Citation): I hope that you will act as my representative in presenting this Unit Citation to the crew, and when you meet them, I also hope you will give them my very special congratulations to all hands.

COMMANDER ANDERSON: It will be an honor to do that, sir.

THE PRESIDENT: Thank you very much. Congratulations, indeed.

SECRETARY GATES: This is the first time a Presidential Citation has ever been given in peacetime.

THE PRESIDENT: I couldn't think of a better time to do it.

MR. HAGERTY: (after the President and others had left)
All right, gentlemen and ladies, one other thing that I think you should know, this mission that the Commander went on was one which the President himself was very personally interested in, and we have been following this boat for some time.

I think the easiest thing to do now is to have the Commander run over for you people very quickly what happened from the time he first got word of the mission.

COMMANDER ANDERSON: Thank you, Mr. Hagerty.

I am a little bit dazed right now, because 14 hours ago I was submerged. 72 hours ago under ice, and only five days ago, at the North Pole. Things are moving too fast.

Right now, the NAUTILUS is steaming toward a Western European port with my extremely capable Executive Officer, Lieutenant Commander Frank Adams in command. The only bad thing about being called down here to Washington is I am a little bit afraid that by the time I get back to the ship, they may find out how totally dispensable I am, and I will be out of a job.

I was brought into discussions on the possibility of making a trans-Polar voyage in January of this year. The NAUTILUS, as perhaps you know, made some preliminary excursions under the ice over on the Greenland Sea side last September, the maximum penetration reaching a point within 180 miles of the Pole. We had some difficulties on that trip, but we learned a tremendous lot which benefited us during this trip just completed.

I was told to prepare the ship in secrecy for a possible trans-Polar voyage. The operation was not set up to be executed until considerable deliberations on the feasibility, part of which included an initial familiarization set of operations conducted by the NAUTILUS up in the Bering-Chukchi Sea areas in June. To set the stage for the possible trans-Polar crossing, the NAUTILUS sailed from her home port in New London, Connecticut, in April of this year, through the Canal, out to the Pacific. While out there, for a considerable period of time, we worked with the Pacific Fleet units, demonstrating our capabilities to the anti-submarine forces out there. On the 8th of June we sailed from Seattle up through the Aleutian Chain and up into the Chukchi Sea, to explore the ice conditions and to make some preliminary excursions underneath the ice, to determine suitability or possible suitability of a cruise all the way across the basin. So we had, in 1957, gone a considerable distance in this direction (indicating), which served as an excellent piece of groundwork. In June of this year we were a fair amount over the distance up in this direction -- (indicating). Following that preliminary investigation, the ship returned on schedule to make the first visit of a nuclear-powered ship to Pearl Harbor. We remained in Pearl Harbor for some three weeks -- approximately three weeks -- demonstrating to Pacific Fleet units in that location the capabilities of the NAUTILUS.

While we were in Pearl Harbor, the Navy set up a series of aerial reconnaissance flights to keep a check on ice conditions to determine for this first crossing the optimum time for our departure from Pearl Harbor. We departed Honolulu on the 23rd of July, and sailed at a rapid speed, submerged, up to the Bering Straits. The transit from Honolulu to the Bering Straits was made at an average speed of almost 20 knots, over a distance of some 2900 miles.

From the Bering Sea we penetrated through open water up to the edge of the Pack. Hoping to find that we could make a straight shot across here -- (indicating) -- we found that due to a stiff northerly wind, the ice had been setting down somewhat further to the south than we had anticipated and into shallow water.

Looking back on it, we possibly could have gotten through on that route. However, on this first occasion, we wanted to find the best highway we could. We went from the vicinity due north of the Bering Strait on over to the coast of Northern Alaska to Point Barrow, exploring the lead that normally develops there during this time of year. We found that that lead was open, leading us directly in open water into a very deep sea channel, the Barrow Sea Valley, a very deep canyon that starts a very few miles off Point Barrow.

Q: How deep is it?

COMMANDER ANDERSON: It initially starts off about 300 feet deep, then working progressively deeper into the point where it's 1200 feet deep, sir.

Once in this sea valley, where we were, so to speak, in our true element, able to cruise fast and deep, we were on our way.

Q: Are you telling us you submerged at that point?

COMMANDER ANDERSON: Yes sir.

Q: Can you point that out, sir?

COMMANDER ANDERSON: I beg your pardon?

Q: Can you point that out, sir, on the map for us?

COMMANDER ANDERSON: Yes. Virtually all of this trip was made submerged, except for some work along the ice edge up in this vicinity which we did on the surface -- (indicating). But going down deep for this penetration through the sea valley was accomplished at about this point right there -- (indicating).

Q: Is that sea valley a geographic name or just your description of something?

COMMANDER ANDERSON: The sea valley is a feature which oceanographers have known about for a considerable amount of time, and it is noted on the charts.

Q: It's near Point Barrow is it?

COMMANDER ANDERSON: That's right, sir. It commences about 15 to 20 miles off Point Barrow.

Q: How wide is it?

COMMANDER ANDERSON: Quite narrow, initially. Only four to five miles wide, and quite restrictive.

Q: Which direction were you going, sir?

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COMMANDER ANDERSON: The sea valley? It parallels the coast. At this point -- (Indicating) -- and leads into the true Arctic Basin, into really deep water, which exists all the way up to the Pole and all the way across.

Q: How wide does it get?

COMMANDER ANDERSON: It gets to the point, sir, where I believe it's 10 or 12 miles, and by the time it becomes ten or twelve miles wide, you enter the Arctic Basin itself and the water is extremely deep.

Q: How deep is that, sir?

COMMANDER ANDERSON: It progresses quite rapidly from the neighborhood of 1200 feet to over 12 thousand feet.

Q: How thick does the ice become?

COMMANDER ANDERSON: How thick? At that point the ice, on the average, is in the neighborhood of ten to fifteen feet thick.

Q: Is this on account of the time of year, or does it stay that way pretty constantly?

COMMANDER ANDERSON: During the summer months it will have wasted away on the average of two to three feet by this time of year. In winter that amount will grow back. Now ice in the Arctic Basin is in motion. Frequently it is under pressure, due to winds and currents. It piles up on each other and forms pressure ridges. You see many, many pressure ridges from the projections down from the ice. Those will measure fifty feet in draft. On some occasions they will measure considerably more.

Q: How deep were you?

COMMANDER ANDERSON: We were cruising below 400 feet, sir. We were cruising at a classified depth.

Q: What does that mean, sir?

COMMANDER ANDERSON: Sir?

Q: What does that mean, sir?

COMMANDER ANDERSON: We are permitted to say that we can go below 400 feet.

Q: Can you give your maximum cruising depths?

COMMANDER ANDERSON: No sir, I am not permitted to say. I can simply say that we are permitted to say that we can go below 400 feet.

Q: Have you any indication of how fast?

COMMANDER ANDERSON: We are permitted to say that we can cruise at speeds over 20 knots.

Q: How fast were you going under the Pole?

COMMANDER ANDERSON: Under the Pole we were going over 20 knots. (laughter)

Q: Do you have any indication whether the Russians spotted you at the time that you were passing through the Bering Straits?

COMMANDER ANDERSON: We have no indication whatsoever. I would be extremely surprised if they did, because all we did coming through there, in order to ascertain a precise navigation point, before going through a rather restricted channel between the Diomedes Islands and the Alaskan Coast, we came up to periscope depth, put our radar up for about thirty seconds, pulled everything down, and we were on our way. If the Russians detected us, they are awfully good.

Q. Was the whole trip made in international waters?

COMMANDER ANDERSON: Yes, the whole trip was made in international waters. Very definitely on the United States side.



Q. This is an ignorant question. Were you able to observe submerged anything other than by radar. Can you operate a periscope under water, or any other way that you could look ---

COMMANDER ANDERSON: Are we speaking of under ice, sir?

Q. Yes.

COMMANDER ANDERSON: Of course, during the time we made the transit we had 24 hours of daylight, so there was always a considerable amount of light present up above. We could look through the periscope and we could see the ice going overhead. Quite a fascinating sight. Like clouds going by extremely rapidly.

We also had what I suppose is the first installation in a submarine of a closed television network. We had a television camera point directly upward and we were also able to observe the ice passing by looking at the television.

Q. How long were you submerged, sir, on the trip -- how many days?

COMMANDER ANDERSON: The trip thus far has lasted I believe 16 days. We have been submerged for perhaps 96, 97 percent of the time. The only time on the surface was probing and surveying the Pack edge from here -- (indicating).

Q. Was that surveying putting up your periscope or, did you bring up the ship?

COMMANDER ANDERSON: We brought the ship up -- to get a really good feel of the conditions up there. Because of the fog, which was coming in and out -- we surfaced -- ran up along the ice to get a better look than you can normally get through a periscope.

Q. Did you have any special navigating equipment on this trip?

COMMANDER ANDERSON: We had a number of special navigating equipments. I believe the NAUTILUS probably, outside of the Navy experimental ship COMPASS ISLAND, has the most advanced navigation equipment that is presently afloat. Besides our normal compasses we have, I guess, roughly twice as many compasses as a normal Navy submarine has, we also have the first combatant ship installation of an inertial navigation system, used much to advantage on this trip.

Q. How much of the trip was actually carried out under ice?

COMMANDER ANDERSON: The crossing itself took four days. The distance covered ---

Q. That's the Ice Pack, sir, four days?

COMMANDER ANDERSON: Yes sir. From the sea valley off Point Barrow to open water in the Greenland Sea was 1830 miles. Of course we had worked some under ice during preliminary investigations, which I am not counting in that figure.

Q: What was the over-all mileage from the point you departed?

COMMANDER ANDERSON: Over-all mileage? From Honolulu to the time that the ship will arrive in a Western European port, will be in the neighborhood of eight thousand to 82 hundred miles, sir.

Q. Commander, did you find any holes in the Ice Pack?

COMMANDER ANDERSON: We found some holes. On last year's cruise we did some surfacing work. On this year's cruise we were in a hurry. We noted the holes and went on.

Q. Why were you in a hurry?

COMMANDER ANDERSON: Navigating under these conditions up close to the Pole, making the voyage with the minimum number of turns, speed changes, depth changes, angle changes, facilitates the accuracy of navigation by a very marked degree. It is possible to get yourself considerably confused by subjecting the ship to a number of turns, and so on. Knowing what we know now, we would make the crossing in a much more relaxed fashion. We wouldn't hesitate to change course, or probe openings. However, we were anxious on this trip to show the possibility of utilizing this route some day as a fast commercial route.

Q. Was it cold down there? What was the temperature like?

COMMANDER ANDERSON: The water temperature, on the average, was about 32 degrees Fahrenheit.

Q. Did your instruments reveal any submarines near you?

COMMANDER ANDERSON: We did not detect any submarines.

Q. Did you have any contact, sir, hostile or otherwise while the vessel was in that area?

COMMANDER ANDERSON: We had some contacts, none hostile.

Q. Could you tell us the exact time when you reached the North Pole?

COMMANDER ANDERSON: It was at 11:15 p.m., Eastern Daylight Time, last Sunday, the third of August.

Q. Did you stop there?

(laughter)

COMMANDER ANDERSON: We kept going.

Q. Were you able to notify Washington on the accomplishment after that time? Were you able to radio ---

COMMANDER ANDERSON: Not at that time. No. We did not notify Washington until we emerged some 36 or 40 hours later in the Greenland Sea.

Q: Were you completely out of communications all that time?

COMMANDER ANDERSON: Well, you might say we were out of communication. If we had an urgent necessity to communicate, I feel quite confident we could have ---

Q: You have said several times, knowing what you know now. What's the most important thing you have learned now which has changed your views?

COMMANDER ANDERSON: A lot of things. For one thing, very few soundings have been taken up in the Arctic Basin. We had no definite assurance that this trip could be made. We had no definite assurance that there was not a range of under-water mountains, so to speak, that would come up to the point where it might almost meet the ice. We felt almost for sure that that was not so, but we had no information of a definite nature to go by.



We did not know to any real extent how our navigation equipment would perform, as far as keeping track of our position. Now we do know.

Q: How did it perform?

COMMANDER ANDERSON: To brag a little bit about our navigators, I really think that this is the most remarkable job in ship navigation that has ever been done.

Q: Could you explain to a layman what you mean by that, Commander?

COMMANDER ANDERSON: A trip across the North Pole, where there is no opportunity to observe anything outside of the ship, no opportunity to observe stars or do any type of electronic navigation, presents a very formidable problem -- or what has been up to now a very formidable problem. For example, it would be possible for a ship equipped with conventional navigation equipment to become so confused at the North Pole that they might actually work themselves around in a slow circle, thinking that they were going in a straight line, and end up coming into perhaps the ice-locked coast off Greenland or even more disappointing, right back where they came from.

We have developed a term for this - what we call on the NAUTILUS "longitude roulette." We felt that we wouldn't play "longitude roulette" up there. We found out that we didn't.

Q: Commander, can you tell us, without violating security, how you were able to avoid this confusion, in language that a layman can understand, without the stars and without the conventional methods? How did you do it?

COMMANDER ANDERSON: We were able to avoid it by having superb navigation equipment -- superb compasses -- by having this advanced inertial type navigation system, and by having such a complex of navigation equipment to check one thing against the other, and the other thing against something else -- repeated over and over again, that we knew we were in business.

Q: What is the depth of the water at the North Pole?

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COMMANDER ANDERSON: At the North Pole the depth of the water is 13,410 feet, which is 1927 feet deeper than anyone has ever claimed it was before. We measured the water with a precision fathometer and it is 13,410 feet deep.

Q: Does the sea valley go under the Pole?

COMMANDER ANDERSON: It does not, sir. It leads into the Arctic Basin. It is over-all quite deep, except in areas where it is criss-crossed by mountain ranges. There is one mountain range called the Lomonosov Ridge, which runs from Canada almost directly across the Pole over into Russia. There is another ridge which extends out in this direction.

Q: These are under-water ranges?

COMMANDER ANDERSON: That's right, sir.

Q: Did you have any accidents or sickness aboard?

COMMANDER ANDERSON: No accidents, no sickness.

Q: Were you in trouble at any point?

COMMANDER ANDERSON: We were in trouble at no point whatsoever. The performance of the ship, and the performance of the crew was superb.

Q: No close calls? No close calls at any time?

COMMANDER ANDERSON: We had no close calls of any sort whatsoever.

Q: Thank you, sir.

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