

= Polaris expedition =

The Polaris expedition (1871) was led by the American Charles Francis Hall , who intended it to be the first expedition to reach the North Pole . Sponsored by the United States government , it was one of the first serious attempts at the Pole , after that of British naval officer William Edward Parry , who in 1827 reached latitude $82^{\circ} 45'$ North . The expedition failed at its main objective , having been troubled throughout by insubordination , incompetence , and poor leadership .

Under Hall 's command , the Polaris departed from New York City in June 1871 . By October , the men were wintering on the shore of northern Greenland , making preparations for the trip to the Pole . Hall returned to the ship from an exploratory sledging journey , and promptly fell ill . Before he died , he accused members of the crew of poisoning him . An exhumation of his body in 1968 revealed that he had ingested a large quantity of arsenic in the last two weeks of his life .

The expedition 's notable achievement was reaching $82^{\circ} 29'$ N latitude by ship , a record at the time . On the way southward , nineteen members of the expedition became separated from the ship and drifted on an ice floe for six months and 1 @, @ 800 miles (2 @, @ 900 km) before being rescued . The damaged Polaris was run aground and wrecked near Etah , Greenland , in October 1872 . The remaining men were able to survive the winter , and were rescued the following summer . A naval board of inquiry investigated Hall 's death , but no charges were ever laid .

= = Preparations = =

= = = Origins = = =

In 1827 , William Edward Parry led a British Royal Navy expedition with the aim to be the first men to reach the North Pole . In the 50 years following Parry 's attempt , the Americans would mount three such expeditions : Elisha Kent Kane in 1853 ? 55 , Isaac Israel Hayes in 1860 ? 61 , and Charles Francis Hall with the Polaris in 1871 ? 73 .

Hall had no special academic background or sailing experience (he was a blacksmith , engraver , then owner of a Cincinnati newspaper) , but he was a voracious reader with an obsession for the Arctic . After John Franklin 's 1845 expedition was lost , Hall 's focus was directed toward the Arctic . He was able to launch two expeditions in search of Franklin and his crew ; one in 1860 ? 63 , and a second in 1864 ? 69 . These experiences established him as a seasoned Arctic explorer , and gave him valuable contacts among the Inuit people . The renown he gained eventually allowed him to convince the United States government to fund his third expedition , an attempt on the North Pole .

= = = Finance and materiel = = =

In 1870 , a bill was introduced in the Senate called the Arctic Resolution , to fund an expedition to the North Pole . Hall , aided by the Secretary of the Navy George M. Robeson , successfully lobbied for , and received , a grant of \$ 50 @, @ 000 from the U.S. Congress to command the expedition and began recruiting personnel in late 1870 . He secured the U.S. Navy tugboat Periwinkle , a 387 @-@ ton screw @-@ propelled steamer . At the Washington Navy Yard the ship was fitted as a fore topsail schooner , and renamed Polaris . She was prepared for Arctic service by the addition of solid oak timber all over her hull , and the bow was sheathed in iron . A new engine was added , and one of the boilers was retrofitted to burn seal or whale oil .

The ship was also outfitted with four whaleboats , 20 feet (6 @. @ 1 m) long and 4 feet (1 @. @ 2 m) wide , and a flat @-@ bottomed scow . During his previous Arctic expeditions , Hall came to admire the Inuit umiak , and brought a similarly constructed collapsible boat which could hold 20 men . Food packed on board consisted of tinned ham , salted beef , bread and sailor 's biscuit . The men intended to supplement their diet with fresh muskox , seal and polar bear , in order to ward off scurvy .

= = Personnel = =

In the spring of 1871 , U.S. President Ulysses S. Grant had named Hall as overall commander of the expedition , and he was being referred to as Captain . Though Hall had abundant Arctic experience , he had no sailing experience , and so the title was purely honorary . In selecting the officers and seamen , Hall relied heavily on whalers with experience in the Arctic . This was markedly different from the polar expeditions of the British Admiralty , which tended to use naval officers and highly disciplined crews .

For his selection of sailing master , Hall first turned to Sidney O. Budington , then to George Tyson , who both initially declined due to prior whaling commitments . When those commitments fell through , Hall named Budington as sailing master and Tyson assistant navigator . Budington and Tyson had decades of experience between them captaining whaling vessels . In effect , the Polaris now had three captains , a fact which would weigh heavily on the fate of the expedition . Further complicating matters , in 1863 Budington and Hall had quarrelled because Budington had denied permission for Hall to bring his Inuit guides , Joseph Ebierbing and Tookoolito , with him on an expedition at a time when they were ill and in Budington 's care .

The rest of the officers and scientific staff were Americans (first mate Hubbard Chester , second mate William Morton , and astronomer and chaplain R.W.D. Bryan) and Germans (chief scientist and surgeon Emil Bessels and meteorologist Frederick Meyer) . The seamen were mostly German , as was chief engineer Emil Schumann . In addition to the 25 officers , crew , and scientific staff , Hall brought Inuit interpreter and hunter Ebierbing , his wife Tookoolito , and their child . A Greenlandic aboriginal named Hans Hendrik , his wife Merkut and three children also joined the expedition .

= = Expedition = =

= = = New York to Upernavik = = =

Even before leaving the Brooklyn Navy Yard on June 29 , 1871 , the expedition ran into personnel troubles . The cook , a seaman , a fireman , and assistant engineer Wilson deserted . The steward turned out to be a drunk , and was left in port .

The ship stopped in New London , Connecticut , to pick up a replacement assistant engineer , leaving on July 3 , 1871 . By the time the ship reached St. John 's , there was dissension among the officers and scientific staff . Bessels , backed up by Meyer , had openly rejected Hall 's command over the scientific staff . The dissension spread to the crew , which was divided along nationalist lines . In his diary , Assistant Navigator George Tyson wrote that by the time they reached Disko Island , Greenland , " ... expressions are freely made that Hall shall not get any credit from this expedition . Already some have made up their minds how far they will go and when they will get home again . " Hall asked Captain Davenport of the supply ship Congress to intervene . Davenport threatened to have Meyer shackled for insubordination and sent back to the United States , at which point all of the Germans threatened to quit . Hall and Davenport were forced to back down , however Davenport delivered a strongly worded speech on naval discipline to the crew .

In another open display of dissent , the ship 's boilers had been tampered with by one of the crew . The special blubber @-@ fired boilers had disappeared , apparently thrown overboard .

On Aug 18 , 1871 , the ship reached Upernavik on Greenland 's west coast , where they picked up the Inuit hunter and interpreter Hans Hendrik . The Polaris proceeded north through Smith Sound and Nares Strait , passing previous furthest north records (by ship) held by Elisha Kane and Isaac Hayes .

= = = Polar preparations and Hall 's death = = =

By Sept . 2 , 1871 , Polaris had reached her furthest north of 82 ° 29'N . Tension flared again as the three leading officers could not agree on whether to proceed further or not . Hall and Tyson wanted

to press north , to cut down the distance they would have to travel to the Pole by dogsled . Budington did not want to further risk the ship , and walked out on the discussion . In the end , they sailed into Thank God Harbor (now called Hall Bay) on Sept . 10 , 1871 , and settled in for the winter on the shore of northern Greenland .

Within a few weeks , Hall was making preparations for a sledging trip with the aim of beating Sir William Parry 's furthest north record . Mistrust amongst the men in charge showed again when Hall told Tyson that " I cannot trust that man (Captain Budington) . I want you to go with me , but don 't know how to leave him alone with the ship . " There is some evidence that Budington may have been an alcoholic ; on at least three occasions he raided the ship 's stores , including the alcohol kept by the scientists for preservation of specimens . Hall had complained about Budington 's drunken behavior , and it fully came to light from the crew 's testimony at the inquest following the expedition . With Tyson watching over the ship , Hall took two sledges with first mate Chester , and the native guides Ebierbing and Hendrik , leaving on Oct 10 , 1871 . The day after leaving , Hall sent Hendrik back to the ship to retrieve a number of forgotten items . Hall also sent back a note to Bessels , reminding him to wind the chronometers at the right time every day . In his book *Trial by Ice* , Richard Parry postulated that such a note from the uneducated Hall must have rankled Bessels , who held a number of degrees from Stuttgart , Heidelberg , and Jena . It was another example of Hall 's micromanagement of the expedition . Before he left on the overland trip , Hall gave Budington a detailed list of instructions regarding how to manage the ship in his absence . This likely did not sit well with a sailing master with over 20 years of experience .

Upon their return on Oct 24 , 1871 , Hall suddenly fell ill after drinking a cup of coffee . His symptoms started with an upset stomach , then progressed to vomiting and delirium the following day . Hall accused several of the ship 's company , including Bessels , of having poisoned him . Following these accusations , he refused medical treatment from Bessels , and drank only liquids delivered directly by his Inuit friend Tookoolito . He seemed to improve for a few days , and was even able to go up on deck . Bessels had prevailed upon Bryan , the ship 's chaplain , to convince Hall to allow the doctor to see him . By November 4 , Hall relented , and Bessels resumed treatment . Shortly after , Hall 's condition began to deteriorate , and he suffered vomiting and delirium , and collapsed . Bessels diagnosed apoplexy , and Hall finally died on November 8 . He was taken ashore and given a formal burial .

= = = Attempt at North Pole = = =

According to the protocol provided by Navy Secretary George M. Robeson , command of the expedition was turned over to Budington , under whom discipline further devolved . The precious coal was being burned at a high rate : 6 @, @ 334 pounds (2 @, @ 873 kg) in November , which was 1 @, @ 596 pounds (724 kg) more than the previous month , and close to 8 @, @ 300 pounds (3 @, @ 800 kg) in December . Budington was often seen to be drunk , but he was far from the only one to pilfer the alcohol stores ; according to testimony at the Inquiry , Tyson was also seen " drunk like old mischief " , and Schumann had gone so far as to make a duplicate of Budington 's key so that he could help himself to alcohol as well . Whatever the role of alcohol , it was clear that shipboard routine was breaking down ; as Tyson remarked , " There is so little regularity observed . There is no stated time for putting out lights ; the men are allowed to do as they please ; and , consequently , they often make nights hideous by their carousing , playing cards to all hours . " For purposes unknown , Budington chose to issue the ship 's supply of firearms to the crew .

There is some evidence of a morally questionable plan being formulated among the senior officers that winter . On Jan 1 , 1872 , Tyson wrote in his diary : " Last month such an astonishing proposition was made to me that I have never ceased thinking of it since ... It grew out of a discussion as to the feasibility of attempting to get farther north next summer . " And then on April 19 , 1872 : " Had a talk with Chester about the astounding proposition made to me in the winter . We agreed it was monstrous and must be prevented . Chester said he is determined , when he got home , to expose the matter . " Author Farley Mowat has suggested the officers were contemplating faking a journey to the Pole , or at least to a very high latitude .

Whatever the unmentioned plan was , an expedition to try for the Pole was dispatched on June 6 , 1872 . Chester led the expedition in a whaleboat , but this was crushed by the ice within a few miles of Polaris . Chester and his men hiked back to the ship , and persuaded Budington to give them the collapsible boat . With this , and Tyson piloting another whaleboat , the men set northward again . In the meantime , the Polaris had found open water , and was searching for a route south . Budington , not eager to spend another winter in the ice , sent Ebierbing north with orders for the Tyson and Chester : return to the ship at once . The men were forced to abandon both craft and walk 20 miles (32 km) back to Polaris . Now three of the ship 's precious lifeboats were lost , and a fourth (the small scow) would be crushed by ice in July after being carelessly left out overnight . The expedition had failed in its main objective to reach the North Pole .

= = = Fate of Polaris and journeys home = = =

With the expedition 's main goal abandoned , Polaris turned south for home . In Smith Sound , west of the Humboldt Glacier , she ran aground on a shallow iceberg and could not be freed . On the night of October 15 , 1872 , with an iceberg threatening the ship , Schuman reported that water was coming in and the pumps could not keep up . Budington ordered cargo to be thrown onto the ice to buoy the ship . Men began throwing goods overboard , as Tyson put it , " with no care taken as to how or where these things were thrown " . Much of the jettisoned cargo was lost .

A number of the crew were out on the surrounding ice during the night when a break @-@ up of the pack occurred . When morning came , the group , consisting of Tyson , Meyer , six of the seamen , the cook , the steward , and all of the Inuit , found themselves stranded on an ice floe . The castaways could see the Polaris 8 to 10 miles (13 to 16 km) away , but attempts to attract the ship 's attention with a large black cloth were futile . Resigned to the ice , the Inuit soon had igloo shelters built , and Tyson estimated that they had 1 @,@ 900 pounds (860 kg) of food . They also had the ship 's two whaleboats , and two kayaks , although one kayak was soon lost during a breakup of the ice . Meyer reckoned that they were drifting on the Greenland side of the Davis Strait and would soon be within rowing distance of Disko . He was incorrect ; the men were actually on the Canadian side of the strait . The error caused the men to reject Tyson 's plans for conserving . The seamen soon broke up one of the whaleboats for firewood , making a safe escape to land very unlikely . One night in November , the men went on an eating binge , consuming a large quantity of the food stores . The group drifted on the ice floe for the next six months over 1 @,@ 800 miles (2 @,@ 900 km) before being rescued off the coast of Newfoundland by the sealer Tigress on April 30 , 1873 . All probably would have perished had the group not included the skilled Inuit hunters Ebierbing and Hendrik , who were able to kill seal on a number of occasions . Despite this , scarcely a word was written about the Inuit in either the official reports of the expedition , or the press .

On October 16 , with the ship 's coal stores running low , Captain Budington decided to run the Polaris aground near Etah . Having lost much of their bedding , clothing , and food when it was haphazardly jettisoned from the ship on October 12 , the remaining 14 men were in poor condition to face another winter . They built a hut from lumber salvaged from the ship , and on October 24 , extinguished the ship 's boilers to conserve coal . The bilge pumps stopped for good , and the ship heeled over on her side , half out of water . Fortunately , the Etah Inuit helped the men survive the winter . After wintering ashore , the crew built two boats from salvaged wood from the ship , and on June 3 the crew sailed south . They were spotted and rescued in July by the whaler Ravenscraig , and returned home via Scotland .

= = Aftermath = =

= = = Inquiry = = =

On June 5 , 1873 , a United States Navy board of inquiry began . At this time , the crew and Inuit families had been rescued from the ice floe , however the fate of Budington , Bessels , and the

remainder of the crew was still unknown . The board consisted of Admiral Louis M. Goldsborough , Secretary of the Navy Robeson , Commodore Reynolds , Captain Henry W. Howgate of the Army , and Spencer F. Baird of the Academy of Sciences . Tyson was the first to appear for questioning , and related the friction between Hall , Budington , and Bessels , and Hall 's deathbed accusations of poisoning . The board also inquired about the whereabouts of Hall 's journals and records . Tyson responded that while Hall was delirious , he instructed Budington to burn some of the papers , and the rest had disappeared . Later , journals of other crew members were discovered at the site of the Polaris wreck , but these had the sections regarding Hall 's death cut out . Meyer testified to Budington 's drinking , saying that the sailing master was " drunk most always while we were going southward " . Steward John Herron testified that he had not made the coffee that Hall had suspected of being laced with poison ; he explained that the cook made the coffee , and that he had not kept track of how many people had touched the cup before it was brought to Hall .

After Budington and the remainder of the crew were rescued and returned to the United States , the board of inquiry continued . Budington attacked Tyson 's credibility , disputing Tyson 's claim that he had obstructed Hall 's efforts to sail the ship further north . He also disputed reports of his drinking , saying that he " [made] it a practice to drink but very little " . Bessels was questioned about Hall 's cause of death . Bessels stated that " My idea of the cause of the first attack is that he had been exposed to very low temperature during the time that he was on the sledge journey . He came back and entered a warm cabin without taking off his heavy fur clothing , and then took a warm cup of coffee . And anyone knows what the consequences of that might be . " Bessels testified that Hall was " taken by hemiplegia " , and his left arm and side were paralyzed , and that he had injected Hall with quinine to correct his elevated temperature before he died .

Faced with conflicting testimony , lack of official records and journals , and no body for an autopsy , no charges were laid in connection with Hall 's death . In the inquiry 's final report , the surgeons general of the Army and Navy wrote : " From the circumstances and symptoms detailed by him , and comparing them with the medical testimony of all the witnesses , we are conclusively of the opinion that Captain Hall died from natural causes , viz . , apoplexy ; and that the treatment of the case by Dr. Bessel [sic] was the best practicable under the circumstances . "

= = = Controversy = = =

There has been speculation as to why Budington and the men aboard the Polaris did not attempt a rescue of those stranded on the ice floe . Tyson was perplexed as to why the ship could not see them 8 miles (13 km) distant , a group of men and supplies waving a dark colored flag in a sea of white . The day after the storm was clear and calm , and the men on the floe could see the ship was under both steam and sail . Aboard the ship , first mate Chester reported that he could see " provisions and stores " on a distant floe , however there were never any orders to retrieve the stores or search for the castaways .

Budington 's decision to beach the Polaris is equally controversial . Budington said that he " believed the propeller was smashed and the rudder broken " . The official report of the expedition states that the vessel should have been abandoned because " there was only coal enough to keep the fires alive for five days " . However , the same report states that the propeller and rudder were in fact discovered to be intact after the ship was run aground , and the ship 's boiler and sails were available . Even if she ran out of coal , the ship was perfectly able to travel under sail alone . In defense of Budington 's decision , when low tide exposed the ship 's hull , the men found that the stem had completely broken away at the six @-@ foot mark , taking iron sheeting and planking with it . Budington wrote in his journal that he " called the officer 's attention to it , who only wondered she had kept afloat so long " .

Regarding Hall 's fate , the official investigation that followed ruled the cause of death was apoplexy (an early term for stroke) . Some of Hall 's symptoms ? partial paralysis , slurred speech , delirium ? certainly fit that diagnosis . Indeed , the pains that Hall complained about down one side of his body , which he attributed to many years ' huddling in an igloo , may have been due to a previous minor stroke . However , in 1968 , Hall 's biographer Chauncey C. Loomis , a professor at

Dartmouth College , made an expedition to Greenland to exhume Hall 's body . Because of the permafrost , Hall 's body , flag shroud , clothing and coffin were remarkably well @-@ preserved . Tests on tissue samples of bone , fingernails and hair showed that Hall had received large doses of arsenic in the last two weeks of his life . Arsenic poisoning appears consistent with the symptoms party members reported : stomach pains , vomiting , stupor , and mania . Arsenic can have a sweet taste , and Hall had complained that the coffee had tasted too sweet , and had burned his stomach . It also appears that at least three of the crew , Budington , Meyer , and Bessels , expressed relief at Hall 's death and said that the expedition would be better off without him . In his book *The Arctic Grail* , Pierre Berton suggests that it is possible that Hall accidentally dosed himself with the poison , as arsenic was common in medical kits of the time . But it is considered more probable that he was murdered by one of the other members of the expedition , possibly Bessels , who was in nearly constant attendance of Hall . No charges were ever filed .

= = Research resources = =

Scrapbooks on the Polaris Expedition held at the American Geographical Society Library , UW Milwaukee