

## Obituaries

**Commodore Owen Connor Sturan Robertson**, GM, RCN, known to his friends as 'Big Robbie,' died on 22 November 1994. Born in Victoria, British Columbia, he was one of the key figures in arousing Canadian interest in the Arctic after World War II. He joined the Canadian Merchant Marine in 1924, and was commissioned into the Royal Canadian Navy Reserve in 1931. He held a variety of commands during this period, including a minesweeper flotilla and the destroyer HMCS *Niobe*. An exciting adventure befell him when he was captain of the dockyard at Halifax. He was called upon to expel an ammunition ship that had gone out of control and was drifting down the harbour. Everybody with any knowledge at all of Halifax at the time knew about the massive explosion that occurred when another ammunition ship went out of control in the same area in December 1917; on that occasion, 3000 tons of explosive had gone up — the biggest man-made explosion before Hiroshima — killing 1600 out of a town population of 50,000. Robertson went aboard the ship, found the officers drunk, and scuttled the ship out to sea. He had shown his metal, and, before long, the same courage and ability would be directed to polar work.

In 1954 Robertson took command of the newly completed icebreaker *Labrador*, the first ship of its kind that the Royal Canadian Navy possessed. On her maiden voyage, she headed north out of Halifax, and, when a number of tasks had been completed — a hydrographic survey, relocating Inuit, and rescuing a pleasure craft — Robertson requested permission to withdraw to the west. This would entail traversing the Northwest Passage, a feat accomplished by only two ships before, both very much smaller than *Labrador*. Permission was granted, as Robertson knew it would be, and thus the traverse of the Passage, and later the circumnavigation of North America, were successfully accomplished. So Canada, the claimant country, was at last able to show that the waterways of the Arctic archipelago were accessible to it. A follow-up hydrographic voyage was planned for 1955, but unfortunately Robertson became ill and had to be flown out when the ship had been at sea for only a few days.

The US Navy was also interested in the navigability of Arctic waters, and in particular in the use of submarines. By special arrangement between the two countries, Robertson was associated with several of the many sub-ice voyages undertaken, notably that of USS *Seadragon* in 1960, when she made an underwater traverse of the Northwest Passage.

Robertson was an Officer of the Order of Canada, and his success in avoiding disaster when escorting the ammunition ship out of Halifax harbour won him the George Medal.

*Terence Armstrong*

**Gösta Hjalmar Liljequist**, Emeritus Professor of Meteorology at the University of Uppsala, died on 18 February 1995, at the age of 81. In the course of a long career, he became one of Sweden's foremost research meteorologists and at the same time a leading polar historian. A native of Kalmar, he studied at the universities of Lund and Uppsala before serving as state meteorologist based in Stockholm from 1938 to 1957.

Liljequist's polar interests were inspired by reading Shackleton at the age of 13. He published his first research paper on ice in 1941 and on the history of polar exploration in 1944. In 1948 he was invited to join the Norwegian–British–Swedish Antarctic Expedition of 1949–1952 as meteorologist. In Dronning Maud Land he was in his element — capitalizing on a long training in experimental and theoretical meteorology and now an explorer in his own right. In addition to carrying a full share of three-hourly synoptic observations, his main interest was in studying surface energy exchange at the expedition's base: Maudheim. Both tasks involved repeated exposure to the elements, sometimes for hours at a time regardless of weather, throughout a two-year stay.

Another of Liljequist's research topics was optical phenomena in the polar atmosphere. His experimental work was based on a thorough understanding of its theoretical background, painstaking attention to detail, and meticulous calibration of instruments. His published results on the 'Energy exchange of an Antarctic snowfield' and 'Optical phenomena' are classics in their field and still much referenced today. It is widely acknowledged that they set the standards for the International Geophysical Year (IGY) of 1957–1958.

In 1957 he moved to Uppsala as Reader in Meteorology and was made Professor the following year. While still involved with Antarctic writing he was invited to lead the Swedish–Finnish–Swiss expedition to winter in Nordaustlandet (Svalbard) during the IGY. From this experience came not only scientific publications but also a book about the expedition: *Arktisk utpost* (1960). Unfortunately for the English-speaking world, his masterly textbook *Meteorologi* (1962) was never translated. In Sweden, Liljequist bridged the academic divide with ease, publishing *Populär meteorologi* (1966). There followed *Klimatologi* (1970) and its equivalent for laymen *Jordens klimat* (1975), then *Moln* (1979) illustrated with his own cloud photographs. All these textbooks were distinguished by lucid explanations of the physical basis of atmospheric phenomena.

Liljequist used to tell colleagues that he was half British because he was conceived in England. Be that as it may, he was fluent in English from an early age and recognized it as the language of science. His very first



Fig. 1. Gösta Liljequist. Photo credit: Valter Schytt.

scientific paper (1938) was in English — in a Swedish journal. Polar history was a hobby, but taken as seriously as any other part of his work. He was a fervent admirer of R.E. Byrd until, in a scholarly analysis of Byrd's flight from Spitsbergen (*Interavia* 1960), he concluded that *Josephine Ford* could not have reached the North Pole.

Liljequist had reason to be proud of his own country's record and spent the years after his retirement preparing what must be the definitive work on Swedish polar exploration — *High latitudes* (1993, 607 pages). His discussions of polar history were scrupulously fair — neither partisan nor nationalistic. In my view, his final volume, written in English, will serve as a lasting memorial to an exceptionally gifted and productive scientist.

At Maudheim Liljequist survived an air crash and carbon monoxide poisoning and was an indefatigable worker. He kept a ready laugh, despite some very hard times on the expedition. I spent months at sea, two years at Maudheim, and one year in Stockholm with him. He proved a modest and generous colleague, and I think we never had a cross word. He had married in 1945 and had a son; sadly, both wife and son predeceased him.

*Charles Swithinbank*

## In Brief

**POLAR MEDALISTS.** The official rolls of those who hold the Polar Medal are currently being checked in an effort to make them as accurate and complete as possible. This work is being undertaken by the Secretary of the Polar Medal Assessment Committee, who thanks all of those who have already replied to direct approaches from him. However, there are numerous medalists whom he has been unable to reach, due to not having current addresses. Would any Polar Medalist who had not already been in contact with the Secretary please write to him:

Rear Admiral J.A.L. Myres, CB  
The Manor House  
Kennington  
Oxford OX1 5PH.

A short 'enquiry form' will then be sent, from which the details in the roll can be verified. One part of this enquiry relates to the inscription around the monarch's head on the obverse of the medal. Two types exist for the present reign, and at some time in the early 1970s it appears that the Royal Mint resumed using a die that was phased out in the mid-1950s. This was realised two years ago and the 'correct' die is now in use again. There is no intention of replacing medals for which the 'wrong' die was used, but it is hoped that it will be possible to annotate the rolls to show which 'type' of medal is held by each recipient.

Recipients who no longer have their medals because of

theft, sale, deposit in a museum, or through other loss are also requested to inform Admiral Myres. In the particular case of theft, he may be able to suggest avenues for recovery or replacement. Once all medalists have been verified, insofar as is possible, copies of the amended rolls will be placed in the Public Records Office, the Scott Polar Research Institute, the British Antarctic Survey, and other relevant institutions in the UK and overseas.

**NEW JOURNAL.** *Expedition News* is an international newsletter published monthly and distributed electronically (by Fax or E-mail). It covers 'expeditions, research projects and newsworthy adventures,' most of them in the Arctic or Antarctic. The aim is to inform 'media representatives, corporate sponsors, educators, research libraries, environmentalists, and explorers' about recent developments, current events, and planned expeditions. It is published by Blumenfeld & Associates, 397 Post Road, Darien, Connecticut, USA. The annual subscription is US\$36.

**DIRECTORY OF ARCTIC SOCIAL SCIENTISTS.** An international directory of social scientists working in the Arctic is being compiled with a grant from the US National Science Foundation, Office of Polar Programs. 'Social science,' for the purposes of the directory, includes, but is