One of the most infamous stories of polar exploration is Sir John Franklin's doomed search for the Northwest Passage. In 1845, Franklin took two Royal Navy ships, *Erebus* and *Terror*, and a crew of 129 into the Arctic to search for a sea route between the North Atlantic and the Pacific. They never returned. Years later, a record of the fateful voyage was discovered among some artifacts in Arctic Canada. Mutiny, insanity, desertion, cannibalism—dreadful things were whispered about the members of the Franklin expedition. More than forty rescue missions were sent from England, at least ten of them financed by Lady Franklin, the leader's widow.

A book about one of Lady Franklin's rescue missions, *The Voyage of the Fox*, was among the nonessential stores and equipment left behind at Ocean Camp. There essentials were now being dragged laboriously over the ice by *Endurance*’s crew. Far to their west on the Antarctic Peninsula was *Erebus and Terror Gulf*, named in honor of the two ships that had navigated the bottom of the world before being lost at the top. Without doubt, Shackleton's men were well versed in stories about the Franklin voyage and well aware of the dangers that faced them as they man-hauled two of the boats over the rotting ice toward a very uncertain goal.

Shackleton had hoped by setting out across the ice to enliven the crew and focus their minds on action. Instead, he found himself faced with
growing resentment and dissatisfaction. Now that Endurance was gone, some of the fo’c’sle hands were grumbling that they were working without pay and were no longer bound to follow Shackleton's orders. In addition, Worsley was constantly fretting about the boats: Shackleton had decided to leave one of them, the Stancomb Wills, behind at Ocean Camp. But Worsley knew that cramming the whole crew into the James Caird and the Dudley Docker once they reached the open ocean would be difficult, if not impossible: the two boats would ride low and heavy in the water, and maneuvering them would take all their skill.

But to drag all three boats—Shackleton knew that was impossible. As it was, the men hauling the Caird and the Docker were sinking up to their knees in slush, and their boots were filling with seven pounds of freezing water with each step. They marched at night, when the surface of the pack was slightly cooler and harder, but even so the labor was horrendous. Again, they relayed one boat at a time in quarter-mile stages, trudging back over their own tracks to bring up the second boat. Often, by the time they reached the second boat, they would find the runners of the sledge frozen onto the ice, and they hadn’t a chance. They would eventually reach the edge of the pack and have the ocean in front of them. The had to take the boats.

On December 27, Shackleton turned back from breaking trail to find that the men hauling the boats were standing idle. Soaked with seat and
seawater, the crew shuffled their feet in the snow, looking anxious and avoiding Shackleton's eyes. Overhead a lone petrel circled, watching the scene. Worsley, angry and exasperated, was in a standoff with a mulish, silent McNeish. The carpenter had decided not to take another step. Under naval law, a ship's crew is free of obligation when the ship sinks. Their duties are terminated, and their ceases. After years at sea McNeish knew his naval law, and he was convinced that Endurance's Ship's Articles were canceled. He wasn't going to follow orders from Worsley or Shackleton or anyone else any longer. He had had enough. This was the first threat to Shackleton's command, but it was a potentially disastrous one. Chances for survival were slim at best if they all stayed together. But if the crew broke apart and chose their own courses, their chances would dwindle to nothing. At that moment, nobody was siding with McNeish—after all, staying behind was obviously fatal. But Shackleton knew how close his crew was to falling apart. The fo’c’sle hands, along with McNeish, had begun grumbling about their duties and pay since the ship sank. And some of the university men, who were unused to such a hard life, were so demoralized by the events of the last months that they seemed ready to break down. Once a man sat down on the ice and decided not to continue, it would require force or threats of violence to get him moving again.
Shackleton returned to the sledge that carried the ship's crew list.

Paper in hand, in a quiet, steady voice, he read the Ship's Articles, which each man had signed before leaving England. They had been modified slightly from the usual contract:

All member of the Crew without exception to have interchangeable duties...The Crew agree to conduct themselves in an orderly, faithful, honest, and sober manner, and to be at all times diligent in their respective Duties, and to be obedient to the lawful commands of the said Master...whether on board, in boats, or on shore.

Shackleton was the Master, and technically they were now on shore; disobedience to the commands of the Master was legally punishable. The Ship's Articles had not been terminated, and neither had the crew's pay. As the sailors' discontent subsided, Shackleton took McNeish aside and exchanged a few quiet words with him, perhaps reminding him that execution was a legal punishment for mutiny. After a short rest, the men wearily harnessed themselves to the boat once more, and McNeish took his place with the others.

The exhausted band of sleds crept over the ice through another night, covering only two and a half miles. The way grew increasingly difficult. The ice was so thin in some places that the heavy lifeboats cracked the floes and formed leads of seawater. Bergs and broken floes were jumbled
together between increasingly large leads of open water. Progress in any
direction began to look impossible.

The next day, they retreated to a large, old floe that seemed solid,
and there they pitched camp, but they soon discovered it was not as secure
as they had hoped. They could not go forward. The way back to Ocean Camp
was impassable. The ice was too soft to cross, but there was not enough
open water to launch the boats. They moved a short distance again, and then
one more time.

At last, they made a new camp. It appeared that they had abandoned
Ocean Camp for no advantage at all. Their new floe was smaller and less
stable. They had left behind many of the things they had salvaged from
_Endurance_, including the scrap lumber that had made dry floors for their
flimsy, canvas tents. They were stuck where they were, and the ice pack was
crumbling to pieces beneath them.

On December 31, 1915, Shackleton wrote in his diary: "The last day of
the old year: May the new one bring us good fortune, a safe deliverance from
this anxious time, and all good things to those we love so far away."

If their loved ones so far away could have seen the crew of
_Endurance_, their hearts would have broken. Nothing could have been more
pitiful and hopeless than the twenty-eight men marooned on the rotting ice
pack nearly 200 miles from the nearest solid land. They called their new home Patience Camp.