

Sydney Midwinter 2000

David Ellyard once again was master of ceremonies as our 75 members and guests enjoyed the company, food, wine and of course the event of the year at the Parramatta Leagues Club. A backdrop video projection of the 1961 Wilkes expedition added to the nostalgia for the large number of ex-Wilkes explorers present. The multitudes of penguins dancing, and bobbing along below the helium-filled balloons and on the tables were skillfully created and executed by Lucinda Coates.

Steve Symonds started the evening off on a high note as he gave the toast to ANARE, being the most recently returned expeditioner. We were treated to a most entertaining account of his voyage as the Club's 1999/2000 representative.

Harry Black (MI57, and part of the Wilkes '60 reunion) told tales of Mawson's derring do who, as he told Harry, would have died on that ill-fated trip if he had made the ship and not had a year to wait and recover. Tribute was paid to Rudi Honkala (also part of the Wilkes '60 reunion) who had been 2IC at Heard Island and heard of the Met. group and who was on the first expedition to Wilkes in '57. Along with Dick Cameron, John Mohl, Paul Newman and Carl Eklund, he traversed 50 miles inland to S2 and set up a station there. Rudi came all the way from Bethel, Maine for the reunion, Other notable salts present were Clive Jewel (three years wintered in a row - '53-'55), 'Chompers' Currie and the indomitable Pat Moonie.

The branch president, after welcoming one and all, reported on the progress of the medallions - 600 out of 800 have been found. Col also informed the gathering that, as of that evening \$5,300 had been raised for the Zoo, and \$1,900 for the Mawson Antarctic Collection Appeal (and a further \$2000 when the Branch assisted AAP). Thanks were given to the outgoing Branch Council and the new one was welcomed - Col Christiansen is captaining the ship again, with willing crew members Kit Scally, Bill Urch, Lucinda Coates, Steve Symonds.

Peter Lawson (HI 51) gave notice that all the crew would be at the MWD in 2001 to celebrate their 50th Anniversary, including Philip Giese - it will indeed be an occasion to remember. John Starr, on the Great Heard Island Appendix Operation, mentioning what a pity it was that the said appendix was not kept for posterity. Rudi told us about S2, where "the Rest Home" hut (geophysical research) was built in late February 1957 with the help of three Weasels. Various other Antarctic encounters were related around the tables.

The raffle was drawn with much ado, the first prize going to a daughter of Neville Woods, second to John Starr and third to Terry Wetherson. The call of the Years bridged the period of 1999/2000 back to 1947 (with a few "missing" years.)

Further reminiscences were aired. David Eastman recalled the fun of going into the unknown, and applauded the Government for doing so much to preserve the Antarctic, as he looked back over the years, and around at the faces who had visited her. John Starr related the return of the first voyage to Macquarie Island, in a ship equipped with radar that worked off batteries that ran out after half an hour. There was a full gale on the port beam for 4-1/2 hours...no sun or stars...flat-bottomed and keel-less so considerable leeway was required (15 degrees was given). They were meant to sight Tasmania in order to go up the Derwent at five

to 12. Where were they? They had a little meeting on the bridge. There were two schools of thought: basically one wanted to head north and the other south - south won. Suddenly, the Captain saw breakers ahead - "Hard aport" Luckily they got out of it, as they were only pulling 18 inches of water at the front. In fact, they were in the middle of the Derwent and, if they had continued another 20 minutes to the north, would have reached Hobart, Now **that's navigation!**

And that's the end of yet another fulfilled NSW midwinter dinner. We hope to see you all again, and to welcome new members and guests at the next one - stay tuned!

Lucinda