

# The Little Red Ship Meets the Deep Blue sea

By Jonathan Copsey/ STAFF

Roswell residents Stuart and Virginia Arey had set their hearts on adventure when they embarked on an Antarctic cruise last November. Adventure was exactly what they found, although not the type they were expecting.

Setting out from Argentina on November 20, the Arey's were aboard the "National Geographic Endeavour," a ship destined for Antarctica for the purpose of a chilly cruise. It was in the early morning, three days later, that they heard of an event which quickly gained worldwide exposure: the "Explorer" had hit an iceberg and was sinking.

The "Explorer" was once known as the "Lindblad Explorer," a Norwegian ship, and was the world's first passenger cruise ship designed to sail the arctic waters. In operation since 1969, the "Explorer" had changed hands and names several times, but always maintained its primary function as an arctic cruise ship. It was last owned by a Canadian travel company, G.A.P. Adventures.

What connected the Arey's to the sinking of such a famous ship was that the "Endeavour" was one of the first ships to respond to the S.O.S.

"(The captain) woke us up at a quarter to six in the morning explaining what was happening," said Stuart Arey, ironically a transportation safety consultant. "By the time we came on deck we could see in the distance the "Explorer" and shortly thereafter we could see the lifeboats that were just there. At the same time the "Nordnorge," the actual rescue ship, had also been alerted and was steaming there."

Despite both ships arriving at the same time, it was the "Nordnorge," a Norwegian ship, which gained all of the international attention. This was because its cabins were mostly empty.

"The determination was made," said Arey, "to put those folks from the "Explorer" on the "Nordnorge" because there was room for them. We could have done it but they would have slept in the dining room."

As a passenger, Arey was forbidden from taking part in the rescue. However, he and his fellow passengers were able to watch the rescue from their ship. The crew from the "Endeavour" helped those of the sinking "Explorer" get to the rescue ship.

"The way that the ships are set up to off-load passengers on these expeditions – meaning we would go to shore on these Zodiacs (inflatable rafts with motors attached) – there would be a door on a relatively low level on the side of the ship," Arey said. "These were not set up for a lifeboat to come aside and have people get out of the lifeboat and get into the other ship. So the people were taken out of the lifeboat into our Zodiacs and then put onto the other ship



Photos by Buz McOmber/SPECIAL

Above, the "Explorer" sinks after hitting an iceberg. Below left, Roswell residents Stuart (left) and Virginia Arey had the "trip of a lifetime" in the Antarctic. Below right, rescuers pick up passengers on lifeboats.



(the "Nordnorge"). It was an arduous process but I guess it was the safest way to do it."

While the impact of the rescue may have added a sense of danger and adventure to the passengers of the "Endeavour," the crew was saddened by the loss of the ship they affectionately called "The Little Red Ship."

"A lot of the people on our ship, including the captain, had served on the 'Explorer.' It had a long history in the Antarctic as the original cruise ship of the company we were with, Lindblad Expeditions," Arey said.

"I've always been a person interested more in airplanes than in ocean-going ships, but basically for people that are involved in the sea, a ship becomes a 'her'; it becomes a being. When they (the crew) saw this being about to die, it was very emotional for them. The captain made a eulogy later in which he explained that before the Canadian company bought this ship, it was destined for India to go up on the beach to be scrapped. And then



was very moving to listen to."

"It was very emotional for everyone on-board," he added.


It took roughly 20 hours for the "Explorer" to sink, a testament to its durability in the harsh climate of the Antarctic. All passengers and crew were unharmed.

After the several hours of the rescue operation, the "Endeavour" continued on its cruise along the rim of Antarctica

"It was everything and more than what we had imagined," Arey said. "We had made our plans almost two years beforehand with the idea that this was going to be a trip of a lifetime, and that's exactly what it turned out to be."

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